



**Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR**

**OPEN UNIVERSITY**

900 F4E N-18024

**AUTHOR:** F4E, Hamilton,

**TITLE:** Illusion of nations

152 + 19

---

178

**Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR**

**OPEN UNIVERSITY**

**LIBRARY**

**HYDERABAD-500 033**

---

**Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR OPEN UNIVERSITY**  
**LIBRARY**

Call No. 400

Accession No.

Author :

FYE

N-18024

Title :

Fyfe, Hamilton  
Illusion of national character

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

---

--	--	--	--



# LIST OF VOLUMES PUBLISHED IN THIS SERIES

*(Some of these are temporarily out of print)*

## GENERAL PHILOSOPHY.

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. First and Last Things.                        | H. G. WELLS.         |
| 3. The Riddle of the Universe.                   | ERNST HAECKEL.       |
| 5. On Liberty.                                   | J. S. MILL.          |
| 10. History of Modern Philosophy.                | A. W. BENN           |
| 27. The Evidence for the Supernatural.           | DR IVOR LL. TUCKETT. |
| 57. Clearer Thinking Logic for Everyman.         | A. E. MANDER.        |
| 62. First Principles.                            | HERBERT SPENCER.     |
| 68. Liberty To-day.                              | C. E. M. JOAD.       |
| 78. The Man versus the State.                    | HERBERT SPENCER      |
| 84. Let the People Think.                        | BERTRAND RUSSELL     |
| 88. World Revolution and the Future of the West. | DR W. FRIEDMANN.     |
| 92. The Conquest of Time.                        | H. G. WELLS          |
| 101. Flight from Conflict                        | LAURENCE COLLIER.    |
| 112. Human Nature, War, and Society              | DR JOHN COHEN.       |
| 113. The Rational Good.                          | L. T. HOBHOUSE.      |

## PSYCHOLOGY.

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 46. The Mind in the Making.             | JAMES HARVEY ROBINSON |
| 48. Psychology for Everyman (and Woman) | A. E. MANDER.         |
| 85. The Myth of the Mind.               | FRANK KENYON          |
| 115. The Distressed Mind.               | J. A. C. BROWN.       |

## ANTHROPOLOGY.

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 14 & 15. Anthropology (2 vols)                            | SIR E. B. TYLOR.          |
| 26. Head-hunters Black, White & Brown (illus)             | DR A. C. HADDON.          |
| 29. In the Beginning · The Origin of Civilization (illus) | Prof. SIR G. ELLIOT SMITH |
| 40. Oath, Curse, and Blessing.                            | ERNEST CRAWLEY.           |
| 45. Men of the Dawn (illus)                               | DOROTHY DAVISON           |
| 80. Jocasta's Crime.                                      | LORD RAGLAN               |
| 82. Kingship.   | A. M. HOCART              |
| 87. Man Makes Himself.                                    | V. GORDON CHILDE          |
| 102. Progress and Archæology.                             | V. GORDON CHILDE.         |

## GENERAL SCIENCE.

- |   |                              |
|---|------------------------------|
| 12. The Descent of Man.                                       | CHARLES DARWIN.              |
| 36. Savage Survivals (illus)                                  | J. HOWARD MOORE              |
| 41. Fireside Science.   | SIR E. RAY LANKESTER.        |
| 47. The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals (illus) | CHARLES DARWIN               |
| 59. Your Body How it is Built and How it Works (illus)        | DR. D. STARK MURRAY.         |
| 61. Man and His Universe.                                     | JOHN LANGDON-DAVIES          |
| 65. Dictionary of Scientific Terms.                           | C. M. BEADNELL, C.B., F.Z.S. |
| 67. The Universe of Science.                                  | Prof. H. LEVY.               |
| 89. The Origin of the Kiss, and other Scientific Diversions.  | C. M. BEADNELL, C.B., F.Z.S. |
| 94. Life's Unfolding.   | SIR CHARLES SHERRINGTON.     |
| 95. An Easy Outline of Astronomy.                             | M. DAVIDSON.                 |
| 97. Man Studies Life.   | G. N. RIDLEY.                |
| 103. The Chemistry of Life.                                   | J. S. D. BACON, M.A.         |
| 104. Medicine and Mankind.                                    | DR. A. SORSBY.               |
| 108. Geology in the Life of Man.                              | DUNCAN LEITCH.               |
| 114. Man : The Verdict of Science.                            | G. N. RIDLEY.                |

## RELIGION.

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 4. Humanity's Gain from Unbelief, and other selections from the Works of Charles Bradlaugh. |                |
| 9. Twelve Years in a Monastery.   | JOSEPH MCCABE. |

11. **Gibbon on Christianity**
  17. **Lectures and Essays.**
  18. **The Evolution of the Idea of God.**
  19. **An Agnostic's Apology.**
  24. **A Short History of Christianity.**
  30. **Adonis A Study in the History of Oriental Religion.**
  34. **The Existence of God.**
  44. **Fact and Faith.**
  49. **The Religion of the Open Mind**
  51. **The Social Record of Christianity.**
  52. **Five Stages of Greek Religion.**
  53. **The Life of Jesus.**
  54. **Selected Works of Voltaire.**
  69. **The Age of Reason.**
  83. **Religion Without Revelation**
  - 90 & 91. **The Bible and Its Background (2 vols)**
  93. **The Gospel of Rationalism.**
  96. **The God of the Bible.**
  98. **In Search of the Real Bible.**
  99. **The Outlines of Mythology.**
  100. **Magic and Religion.**
  105. **The Church and Social Progress.**
  106. **The Great Mystics.**
  107. **The Religion of Ancient Mexico.**
  109. **A Century for Freedom.**
  110. **Jesus Myth or History?**
  111. **The Ethics of Belief, and other Essays**
- T. H. HUXLEY.  
GRANT ALLEN.  
Sir LESLIE STEPHEN, K C.B.  
J. M. ROBERTSON.  
Sir J. G. FRAZER.
- JOSEPH McCABE.  
Prof. J. B. S. HALDANE.  
A. GOWANS WHYTE.  
JOSEPH McCABE.  
Prof. GILBERT MURRAY.  
ERNEST RENAN  
Trans by JOSEPH McCABE.  
THOMAS PAINE  
JULIAN S. HUXLEY.  
ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.  
C. T. GORHAM.  
EVANS BELL.  
A. D. HOWELL SMITH.  
LEWIS SPENCE.  
Sir J. G. FRAZER  
MARJORIE BOWEN.  
GEORGE GODWIN.  
LEWIS SPENCE  
Dr KENNETH URWIN.  
ARCHIBALD ROBERTSON.  
W. K. CLIFFORD

## **HISTORY.**

6. **A Short History of the World (revised to 1944)**
  13. **History of Civilization in England (vol 1).**
  25. **The Martyrdom of Man.**
  39. **Penalties Upon Opinion.**
  72. **A Short History of Women.**
- H. G. WELLS.  
H. T. BUCKLE.  
WINWOOD READE  
H. BRADLAUGH BONNER.  
JOHN LANGDON-DAVIES.

## **FICTION.**

37. **The Revolt of the Angels.**
  38. **The Outcast.**
  70. **The Fair Haven.**
  77. **Act of God.**
- ANATOLE FRANCE.  
WINWOOD READE.  
SAMUEL BUTLER.  
F. TENNYSON JESSE.

## **MISCELLANEOUS.**

2. **Education: Intellectual, Moral, and Physical.**
  7. **Autobiography of Charles Darwin.**
  16. **Iphigenia.**
  28. **The City of Dreadful Night, and other Poems.**
  32. **On Compromise.**
  43. **The World's Earliest Laws.**
  60. **What is Man?**
  63. **Rights of Man.**
  64. **This Human Nature.**
  66. **A Book of Good Faith. Selections from the Works of MONTAIGNE, arranged, and with an Introduction by**
  71. **A Candidate for Truth. Passages from RALPH WALDO EMERSON chosen and arranged by**
  74. **Morals, Manners, and Men.**
  75. **Pages from a Lawyer's Notebooks.**
  79. **The World as I See It.**
  86. **The Liberty of Man, and Other Essays.**
- HERBERT SPENCER.
- TWO Plays by EURIPIDES.  
JAMES THOMPSON ("B V.").  
JOHN VISCOUNT MORLEY,  
O.M., P.C.  
CHILPERIC EDWARDS.  
MARK TWAIN.  
THOMAS PAINE.  
CHARLES DUFF.
- GERALD BULLETT.
- GERALD BULLETT.  
HAVELOCK ELLIS.  
E. S. P. HAYNES.  
ALBERT EINSTEIN.  
R. G. INGERSOLL.

**THE ILLUSION OF  
NATIONAL CHARACTER**

Of this book Bernard Shaw wrote :—

“ I have read it from cover to cover. It is a righteous piece of work ; and I can appreciate it better than most for all the wars since the Crimean have occurred in my lifetime.”

In the opinion of H.G. Wells

“ this cool, clear, cleansing book ought to be put into the hands of every schoolboy, and especially of every public schoolboy and schoolgirl as a supplement and corrective to the ordinary history teaching they have experienced.”

H. G. Wells also described the book in a review as

“ very timely and wholesome, and in places grimly amusing ; a contribution of fundamental value to the spade work that has to be done for the foundation of a new and better order in the world.”

Sir Norman Angell, in a review, said :—

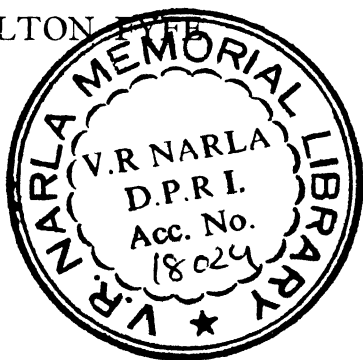
“ For the public to react against folly they must be made conscious of the fallacies and illusions by which folly is made to appear wisdom. To the unveiling of one such illusion Mr. Fyfe has made an interesting and valuable contribution.”



The Thinker's Library, No. 116

# THE ILLUSION OF NATIONAL CHARACTER

BY  
HAMILTON FIFE



LONDON:  
WATTS & CO.,  
5 & 6 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4



## A DECEPTION AND A DANGER

What does the word "nation" mean? To what extent are speakers and writers justified in talking of a nation as a person? . . . In what sense can a nation be described as having a will, or national interests? . . . Nation is only one of several dozens of rich and resonant words which are ordinarily accepted without a thought, but which it is essential, if we would think clearly, that we should subject to the most searching analysis.—*Aldous Huxley in "Ends and Means."*

As we look back and try to pierce the mists that hide the early history of mankind, we can discern dimly an age in which the family was the social unit—not only the largest, but the only one. Each family dwelt apart, was self-sufficient, looked on other families as hostile. There was a state of constant war between families.

Then we find families displaced as the unit by tribes or clans. All who belonged to a tribe, all who greeted each other as fellow-clansmen, either were or imagined themselves to be descended from the same remote ancestors. This, they supposed, gave them a character which distinguished them alone, which was different from the characters of other tribes or clans. That supposition became a barrier separating them from outsiders. It thus developed into an excuse for murders, massacres, continual fighting, perpetual ill-will.

Within the tribe fighting was discouraged. Families no longer fought with one another, no longer believed it to be natural, that they should fight. It was natural, however—so they were taught—that tribes should be in a state of incessant enmity. This lasted in the Highlands of Scotland until a century and a half ago. It still endures in parts of the Balkans, in parts of Africa, in parts of Asia.

Among people who are called civilized the tribal stage has been for a long time left behind. It was succeeded by the national stage. Tribes, clans, septs, combined to form nations. No matter what diverse and conflicting elements might be brought together in the new unit, the nation, they were not to war among themselves. But it was considered inevitable, natural, that wars between nations should be frequent; and, in order to keep the fighting spirit keen, each nation was encouraged to regard itself as endowed with virtues superior to those of the rest.

This illusion is still fostered. The idea that nations have differing characters still prevails. It has been one of the most dangerous and most potent of the elements making for war. It is the most effective hindrance to the next step in civilization, the formation of social units which will include many nations, leading eventually to a world federation of peoples based on the conception of one common humanity, pervading all, excluding none.

Until that conception supersedes the idea that some nations are of worthier descent than others, that their characters vary, that they can never live at peace together, it will be impossible to pull up the roots of war. It is important, therefore, to examine the idea of national character, to discover how it arose and why it is maintained, to trace its connection with patriotism and ruler-worship, to see how completely the theory of the State existing apart from the individual is dependent on it. This analysis I hope to make, with the object of proving national character to be an illusion, and one that is doing great harm in the world.

One part of my task will be easy: exposure of the commonly accepted view that national characters are distinct, homogeneous, well-defined.

Sir James Frazer has said that every great figure in history is "a harlequin whose parti-coloured costume differs, according as you look at him from the front or the back, from the right or the left. His friends and his foes behold him from opposite sides, and they naturally see only that

particular hue of his coat which happens to be turned towards them."

True as that is of individuals, it is more true of groups, especially true of nations. There are no qualities, which can be said to distinguish a group, such as a club or profession, much less a nation. No one would say: "Doctors are rash or cautious," "Bricklayers are polite or boorish," "Members of the Carlton Club are generous or stingy." Yet, while recognizing that a small group cannot be generalized, almost everybody has until lately taken it for granted that the characteristics of a very large group can be accurately ascertained and set down. This cannot continue. The assumption will not bear analysis. Soon it will be numbered among the popular errors and superstitions that have confused and injured mankind.

By playing upon this folly, rulers have in the past caused immeasurable suffering and ruin. From the time when the Hebrews were told by their fanatical, and therefore slightly demented, leader Moses that they were a "chosen race," appointed to wipe out other races and seize their territory, the idea that nations have characters and missions has frequently tormented and devastated the world.

It is an idea which, so far as I can discover, has never been examined and analysed. It has been uncritically accepted as a fact, though actually it is as much a fiction as the supposed flatness of the earth, the supposed travelling of the sun around the earth, the separate creation of all forms of life, and the differentiation between "the human and the animal kingdoms." All these beliefs, once universally held, are now universally rejected as delusions.

They were allowed to pass for truth because no one challenged them, just as the illusion of national character has been given credence for the reason that it has not been questioned, dissected, exposed. Hardly one of the prominent authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries doubted that war was a permanent, unavoidable part of the world order. From this they deduced differences between nations, which produced hostility. Certain

nations (France and England, Russia and Turkey) they regarded as "natural enemies"; thus they attributed to conflicting temperaments or ideals among the masses what were in fact clashes of material interest among rulers or ruling classes.

This dumb acceptance of evils which we know now to be unnecessary, springing only from Peoples' ignorance and rulers' incapacity or guile, makes the books of even the ablest and most brilliant writers of the Victorian Age seem antiquated. Prof. Karl Pearson, for example, highly regarded as teacher and philosopher, laid it down that "there is a struggle of race against race, and nation against nation," and that "a national spirit was wholly good" if it took the form of "a strong feeling of the importance of organizing the nation as a whole, of making its social and economic conditions such that it is able to do its work in the world and meet its fellows without hesitation in the field" (that is, the battle-field) "or the market." \*

Nations, it seemed to Karl Pearson, must be "organized wholes in continual struggle with other nations, whether by force of arms or by force of trade and other economic processes"; and this was not a wholly bad thing, since it was the "source of human progress throughout the world's history."

Another Pearson (C. H.) about the same period went from England to Australia, became Minister of Education in the State of Victoria, and after his return wrote a book called *National Life and Character*, which was earnestly discussed, as it deserved to be. He foresaw the advance of Socialism, but he did not anticipate any federation of Socialist States which would eliminate the risk of war between them. He predicted that "every State will have to be constantly on its guard against dismemberment or subjugation." That prediction came true.

Where his book seems old-fashioned when we read it to-day is in the writer's failure to throw his glance forward

\* *National Life from the Standpoint of Science*, 1901.

to a time when there would not any longer be this perpetual armed watchfulness, burdensome in its cost and disastrous in drawing energy away from wholesome activities.

Recent writers have been little more discerning. Prof. Ernest Barker, who published in 1927 a book on *National Character and the Factors in its Formation*, did not begin by asking whether there was such a thing as national character; he took it for granted and expected his readers to do the same.

His definition was :—

“National character is the sum of acquired tendencies built up by leaders in every sphere of activity, with the consent and co-operation, active in some, but more or less passive in others, of the general community.”

Prof. Barker does not include inherited tendencies, yet these, as factors of national character, are proclaimed more insistently than elements acquired or implanted by schooling and patriotic propaganda. By ignoring them Prof. Barker showed that he had a clearer understanding of his subject than he set down in the book. But only by inference could the reader gather this.

The thought and emotions of a people can certainly be altered by education, by the newspaper Press, by having doctrines dinned into their ears. Such alteration may be accomplished in a short time. It is not many years since the people of the United States believed everything American to be, if not perfect, at any rate the best possible. That self-complacent attitude has disappeared.

Within four years from the ending of the first World War the British people dropped the shout of “Make Germany pay” and murmured dislike against France for trying to secure payment by invading the Rhur, an ill-advised expedient which the English four years earlier would have applauded. The French allowed the reactionary elements in Army and Church to condemn Dreyfus and to drive Zola out of the country. A few years later the French honoured Zola as a great lover of truth. The Germans

were proud of Einstein in 1932 ; in 1933 they burned his books !

Men and women who easily change their minds, their sympathies, are said to be weather-cocks, to lack character. Apply the same reasoning to nations and it will be seen that since no nation can show a consistent line of action, none have national characters.

The analogy between individuals and nations is based upon the supposition that a group is, morally and intellectually as well as numerically, the sum of the individuals included in it. But the behaviour of a group, which Gustave Le Bon called " a crowd " and Prof. Trotter " a herd," is known to be different from what would be the behaviour of each separate man and woman composing that group. Incitements that would leave individuals cold work upon masses of individuals with irresistible power. Generous emotions can be aroused in crowds to which very few of the people united in them might be capable of responding in isolation. Evil passions can be stirred from which almost every unit, if alone, would recoil.

When for long periods these passions or emotions are not awakened, the characters of nations are said to have changed.

Because executions of criminals are not any longer popular spectacles in England, the English are supposed to be milder and more civilized in their tastes. But the same kind of people who once went in the nineteenth century to see men hanged and made a festivity of the occasion, who thronged in the eighteenth to see bulls baited and in the seventeenth to watch witches drown, now go in the twentieth to stare at the lion which killed a man or the house where a murder was committed ; they watch dangerous performances, stunt flying or motor-car speed record-breaking or dirt-track racing, on the chance of an accident happening.

There are always such people in a nation, in every nation. There are always people of another sort who are disgusted, instead of delighted, by anything which stresses the cruel, sordid, debasing sides of life. In between are the " compact



majority " of Ibsen, who can be swayed this way or that by whichever of the two groups get the upper hand.

The marriage of a young queen (Victoria) to a conscientious German, coinciding with the rise to power of a middle class religiously inclined, changed the tone of English life for sixty years and was thought to have changed the character of the nation. But at the end of those sixty years there was a throw-back to earlier morals and manners which proved that many still preferred laxity to a strict code of virtue. As soon as they got the chance, they put their preference into practice. But the national character was not affected. As many people as before were still in favour of keeping up the outward decencies. George V won their devotion by his respectability. Scandalized by Edward VIII, they dismissed him and set in his place his more tractable, conventional brother.

During these proceedings the English masses remained, in the immortal Marjorie Fleming's phrase, " more than usual calm," and were assured by their newspapers that they had displayed " national character," had behaved as no other people would have done in like circumstances. The newspapers forgot that the German nation let the last Hohenzollern emperor go, showing no sign of regret ; that the Austrians gave up a most ancient empire without a pang ; that the Serbians went about their business as usual when their king and queen were both murdered ; that the French let first a Bourbon and then an Orleanist king depart, showing neither grief nor exultation, while the abdication of the Tsar of all the Russias, who had been represented as the idol of his subjects, left them indifferent—if they were not rejoicing. All nations, in circumstances more or less alike, behave in the same way. They always have done, so far back as we possess any records.

In all periods nations, apparently peace-loving and alive to their interest, have been turned into yelling mobs by the announcement that their rulers have either deliberately decided on war or have " stumbled and staggered " into it. At once " the enemy " is denounced as criminal, lunatic,

inhuman. Spy mania develops in persons of kindly disposition and fair intelligence traits that are both imbecile and ferocious. The most absurd fictions are mistaken for fact; military leaders of mediocre ability are almost worshipped.

Yet there is nothing in human nature which makes it more susceptible to foolish and savage incitements than it is to appeals calling into play generosity, pity, any of the nobler emotions. The enthusiastic crowds which greeted President Wilson when he arrived in Europe for the Paris Peace Conference were moved by the wise words he had spoken, by the honourable conditions which he proposed to offer the Germans, by his unlikeness to the other war statesmen. Admiration was soon checked by his ineptitude in the details of diplomacy, his allowing the noble principles he had sketched to be concealed by intrigue and chicanery. If he had kept to broad issues, refused to be entangled in webs of spider-politicians, he could have retained his influence and popularity, he could have created an atmosphere for his League of Nations in which it might have thrived. If nations seldom react to the finer impulses, it is because these are so rarely suggested to them.

Almost always those whose voices reach whole nations are self-seekers, ambitious tricksters; they appeal to the worst in their dupes. From the beginnings of history we see exactly the same tricks worked by them—with exactly the same effect.

Dictators always play up the national idea—for the reason that it can find easy lodgment and a welcome in those least developed minds which are everywhere in the majority. The masses are glad to be told they are better than their neighbours.

A hundred years ago any fool could raise a cheer in an English public assembly by boasting that "one Englishman can lick three Frenchmen any day." Hitler roused shouts of equal fervour when he bade Germans remember that their destiny was to become the greatest of all the nations. Mussolini's appeals to Italians to show themselves "true

descendants of ancient Romans," and create a second Roman empire, were applauded with frenzy.

Stupid persons used to be (some still are) proud of belonging to "old" families, proud to be able to trace their ancestors back through past ages. This, they thought, gave them a claim to deference from fellow-creatures whom they despised as inferiors. That form of stupidity has been laughed away, but the new form, pride in nationality, is equally foolish—and vastly more harmful.

It has revived in its most imbecile form an old theory of the State, one of the many nonsensical doctrinaire theories included in Plato's *Republic*, that vastly over-rated book. Even its author soon ran away from his own monstrous conception. In later works, especially the *Laws*, he abandoned altogether the notion that an abstraction called "the State" was of more value than the individuals who composed it. Unfortunately the harm was done.

Despots have in all ages claimed for their machinery of suppression an importance far above that of the people suppressed. Louis XIV formulated the demand with an ineffable mixture of conceit and effrontery, when he announced "*L'État, c'est moi!*" (I am the State). As late as the middle of last century a certain King Charles Albert of Piedmont declared: "The King is the only person empowered by God to judge of the fittest means to compass the welfare of his subjects, and it is the first duty of a loyal subject not to complain."

Later absolutists have had their pretensions wrapped round with a jargon of pseudo-philosophy. It always amounts to the same thing, an attempt to frighten or cozen people into regarding as eternal, as worthy of worship and sacrifice, a system hastily botched up and likely to be as hastily destroyed.

In its latest forms this theory of the State is bound up with the supposed "national characters" of its victims: they are urged to accept it because it is intrinsically German, Italian, or Japanese. They are told that a splendid future lies before them if they will regard the State as

everything and their own comfort, freedom, happiness, lives even, as nothing. Should they refuse, they are threatened with extinction.

Not only wars waged by tyrants for the continuance of their rule, but all modern wars have been made possible by this delusion. Its effects, far from being weakened by what is called the spread of education, have been exhibited this century in a more inflamed, irrational form than they ever took before. There has grown up a doctrine that there must exist permanent hostility between nations which adopt the "totalitarian" form of government and those which hold to democratic methods.

The 1914-18 War prepared the world for this. In every country which fought during those years the populace were taught to consider "the enemy" as utterly different, and of course utterly inferior to themselves. Exactly the same incitements to hatred, exactly the same lies calculated to excite anger and loathing, were put in circulation on both sides.

Among the troops these had almost no success. Soldiers in the fighting line soon saw that they and the men opposed to them were in the same boat. They fraternized whenever they could, just as Wellington's soldiers did with the French in the Peninsula. The feelings of "nations in arms" were little different from those of professional forces.

But among those who saw nothing of the war, among women especially (more in the comfortable class than the other), among men who stayed at home either from disability or inclination, there prevailed a lunatic belief that enemy nations were composed of criminals exulting in cruelty, people who deserved nothing short of extermination. This insanity, provoked by the politicians, made these same politicians fearful of listening to reason, even when one of themselves (Lord Lansdowne) was bold enough to give it expression.

How artificial all this insanity was could be shown by countless proofs. I will take one only, one that is so illuminating as to be sufficient. Mr. Lloyd George, who

had during the war charged the Germans with deliberately preparing plans for the enslavement of Europe, said, when it was all over, that "nobody had wanted war." It was a disaster into which we had "stumbled and staggered."

Philip drunk and Philip sober told very different stories !

Even if the rulers of Germany had planned any such folly as was charged against them, it would have been equally foolish to hate individual Germans for it. In a sense, nations are responsible for what their governments do, more especially those which can vote governments in and turn them out. But very few electors, as a rule, have any idea, when they vote, what a government is likely to do, or what it is doing when it has been given power. And always there are many who are not in agreement with their rulers.

Before we can justly feel indignant with individuals on account of things done by a government, we ought to inquire how far they are supporters of government policy. Even such support cannot rationally be accepted as ground for off-hand condemnation ; it may have been obtained by false pretences, by taking advantage of ignorance or credulity.

The same mass-creation of hatred went on in all the warring countries. The United States put more pep into the business than any other belligerent. It was hard to convince a population which included millions of Germans that the inhabitants of Germany were sub-human. Americans, when they were ordered to take this view, thought with bewilderment of intelligent, honest, kindly, fellow citizens named Hirsch or Muller or Schmidt. Nevertheless they obeyed. Nowhere did the anti-German fury rage more savagely or more foolishly than in the United States. Neither justice nor rationality is considered when it suits governing persons to stir up hatred and to represent a whole nation as faithless, brutally selfish, below the civilized level.

This method of inducing peoples to make war was little used by monarchs when they looked upon Peoples as packs of savage hounds which could, as historian C. A. Fyffe put it, be urged on to attack other packs for their master's

advantage. The monarch had then no need of any fiction to delude his warriors. They fought either because they were made or paid to fight. They were not told why. If there seemed any doubt of their standing firm, they were warned that the enemy would horribly torture and kill them should they be taken prisoner. But no pretence could be put up that they were fighting against people altogether unlike themselves, for among the mercenaries on the other side would be in all probability men from their own country, speaking their language.

Let us see, then, whence and when the hate motive, based on national character, came.

## II

### A HINDRANCE TO THE GOOD LIFE

We are told that patriotism is the outcome of common ancestry ! How absurd ! Look at the North Americans, that strange mingling of all the races of the world, yet they display an American patriotism as jingo and exclusive as that of Czechs or Hungarians. Turn to the Hungarians who are so proud of their Magyar descent—they are a mixture of Slavs, Jews, and Magyarized Germans.—*Auguste Forel, eminent French entomologist.*

THE hate motive first came into prominence during the wars of religion. Catholics were adjured to regard Protestants as enemies of God. Protestant teaching represented Catholics as followers of anti-Christ (the Pope). By these means even members of the same nation were persuaded to massacre one another.

Then came the era of exaggerated nationalism. This was a consequence of the tyrannies, monarchical and religious, which had prevented national development. The French Revolution, the uprising of the Greeks against Turkey, of the Belgians against Holland, of Italians against Austria, the Papacy, and the kingdom of Naples, transformed the *odium theologicum* into mutual hate between nations. The method of embittering hostility which priests and presbyters had employed was seized by "liberators," by tyrants, by politicians. The politicians found it so effective that they have never let it go.

In some ways they have improved it as a creator of alarm and detestation. Children were told at the beginning of the nineteenth century that Napoleon was an ogre who would eat them alive. People of all ages are made to believe in the twentieth that other people of their own kind must be feared for much more terrifying reasons. No limit can be set to

the credulity of the great mass everywhere when such fables are related to them.

This credulity has been a danger, and many times a disaster, during the past hundred years. Why did Greville write in his Diary that the two men, Delane and Reeve, responsible for the policy of *The Times* in 1846, could "at any moment set all Europe in a state of excitement and fill the great Cabinets and Kings and Ministers with terror or rage"? He wrote it because *The Times* could at that period make the British nation believe almost anything it chose to print. Fortunately those two men were very careful as to what it did print. No single newspaper has power like that to-day; but, acting together, the Press is able to influence the public mind as easily as a piano-player produces required notes by pressing down keys.

A great deal, if not all, of the trouble which has piled up in Europe is the result of people everywhere being taught by rulers and newspapers to distrust one another; to suppose that their interests clash, with those of their neighbours; to regard those neighbours as inferior, presumptuous, unfriendly. All of that teaching is based on the delusion that nations have different characters and on forgetfulness of the fact that, when we speak of "a country," we really mean the rulers of that country. All of it is contrary to the truth.

The interest of the mass of mankind is the same everywhere; they want shelter and food, clothes and household possessions, education, employment, security, leisure, recreation. "They care not what government they live under, so as they may plough and go to market," Sir Arthur Haselrig said of the seventeenth-century English. That is the nature of men and women at all periods, whatever country they may live in. In every country all kinds are to be found. To imagine that in any country they are all of a kind, either worse or better collectively than the men and women in any other country, is ignorant folly. To suppose that all the people composing a nation have the same virtues, vices, prejudices, habits, is to disregard daily experience.



It is true the masses, wherever they live, can be incited by rulers and newspapers to consent to ambitions and designs of robbery, even to appear enthusiastic about them. But no one who has studied the creation of public opinion has any doubt as to its artificiality. When the old rulers of Russia wanted sovereignty over Constantinople, they could quote "the desire of the People to see the Cross above the Crescent on Saint Sophia"—and get away with it. But when Russians were told by their new rulers that this was all rubbish, they chased Miliukov out of office as Foreign Minister for repeating the old story.

The British People, under the influence of an intensive doorstep campaign by the League of Nations Union, voted for collective security. But, when Abyssinia was abandoned by all who had guaranteed to protect it and the British People were told that this really couldn't be helped, they shrugged their shoulders and said that evidently nothing could be done about it. Had there been opportunity for another invasion of doorsteps, they could have been induced to sign their names to almost anything, not even stopping short of war, if their emotions had been engaged.

President Wilson professed to have American public opinion behind his expressed resolve to keep his country out of the War. It voted him into office a second time on that programme. But as soon as the President decided to go in, under pressure from Finance and Big Industry, public opinion changed so quickly and completely that none who stood out against it could feel their lives or liberty safe.

The same change from eagerness for peace to war-frenzy was registered in Japan in 1937. In spite of all the efforts to stir up hatred against the Chinese, "the atmosphere in the country almost had a pacifist complexion," wrote Herr Günther Stein, a well-informed observer.

Then, as the sequel to an "incident," now supposed to have been planned by the Japanese High Command in China, a sudden vigorous blowing-up of public opinion with the bellows of propaganda began, and "the surface

atmosphere changed entirely." A violent war-hysteria attacked the whole of the Press, all political parties, business circles, the public in general.

Little improvement in world conditions can be expected while nations are egged on to dislike and mistrust one another and held responsible for all their rulers' acts and words. If newspapers chose to tell their readers that in the experience of all who have travelled widely human beings everywhere are very much alike, that they have far more in common than is crudely supposed, that they are by nature of a friendly disposition, most of the world's troubles would begin to clear up.

That is the truth. Even Kipling, nationalist though he was, had learned it ; he let it slip out when he wrote :—

"For there is neither East nor West, border nor breed nor birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from  
the ends of the earth."

Maybe it takes a strong man at present to thrust aside the delusion that there are many varying orders of humanity, to jump the barriers that have been built by imperfect knowledge and silly pride. But, strong or weak, the truth is the same for all. Humanity is one. The variations are not of order or species. They are produced within each nation by surroundings, habits, education, all the influences of family and group.

Buckle, in his vast fragment which was to have been a *History of Civilization in England*, classified the physical agents by which the human race is most powerfully influenced under the heads Climate, Food, Soil, and the general Aspect of Nature. Not all of Buckle's arguments survive analysis, but the conclusion to which they lead has been accepted and reinforced. When, towards the middle of last century, a very young child was taken to England from Tierra del Fuego, where the natives live in squalor, cultivate neither their minds nor imaginations, and lack entirely the social virtues, and when this child grew up in its English home with what Darwin called "a good intellect and a nice disposition," even men of science were surprised.

Nobody possessing the slightest knowledge of human development would be surprised now.

It took time for the implications of Darwinism to affect even the more acute-minded of the generations which immediately followed Darwin. Up to the end of the nineteenth century, and even beyond that, the notion prevailed that it was "natural" for human beings grouped together in different States to be on terms of perpetual enmity with one another.

Unhappily there are even now in most countries few who can foresee any other future than this. The mass of us continues to imagine vaguely that there exist deeply implanted racial and national characters, and that these divide human beings by unbridgeable gulfs.

Many of us like to fancy that our national characters derive from ancient ancestry. These people would be annoyed or scornful were anyone to assure them that they, as individuals, resembled their personal progenitors of several hundred, or even one hundred, years ago. They would point out that changed conditions of life have altered manners, conduct, customs, even mentality. They would deny that any man who was exactly like his father or grandfather—any woman who thought, felt, acted as her mother or grandmother did—could be fully developed or entirely normal. Yet these same people try to believe that nations have personalities which persist through many centuries, notwithstanding the changes that have occurred in all the departments of their corporate lives.

They do not attribute a uniform "character" to the members of a club or a society—not even to a club consisting of people with the same social standing or the same political opinions, not even to a society formed by men and women drawn together by a common definite aim. They do not imagine that a body of workers on some task—say bridge-building or laying a railway—will be alike in their feelings or their thoughts.

The boys at school, the young men at a university, may have a certain cast imparted to their minds or emotions ;

that is the result of deliberate effort to influence them. They have "character" pumped into them. A few may retain some impress of this throughout life, but nearly all, as soon as the pumping ceases, become indistinguishable from the mass.

Football and baseball teams, rowing eights, are very closely associated during their training, yet no one expects the players to resemble one another in their mental or moral qualities. Why should it be supposed that, while smaller groups are exempt from character-forming influences, bodies so enormous as nations should be moulded by them?

The absurdity of it is emphasized by the diversity of views as to what outstanding national characteristics are. Thus one Englishman will pride himself on belonging to the nation which produced Oliver Cromwell and John Wesley, another will exalt the loyalty of Cavaliers and the devotion of High Church non-juror clergymen.

There are Americans who consider Herbert Hoover a great man and Woodrow Wilson a crazy idealist, who rate Henry Ford and Andrew Carnegie far above Walt Whitman and Mark Twain, who would place a film star higher in the national roll of honour than Edison or Mr. Justice Holmes. Which of these are the "true Americans"?

One Frenchman calls his national spirit that of Montaigne and Voltaire, a second derives it from Saint Louis and the famous Jesuits of later date, a third worships "*la gloire*" and considers Napoleon the incarnation of the genius of the French People.

There are Germans who point to Goethe as the embodiment of Teutonic wisdom, calm, tolerant, wishing well to all; other Germans hold that Frederick "the Great," faithless and rapacious, Bismarck with his policy of Blood and Iron, and Hitler, exploiting all brands of malevolent prejudice, represent truly their most prominent national traits.

The ease and rapidity with which nations can be induced to drop one "trait" and exhibit another show that they have no settled, permanent characters. Let me give an

example of a change in national sentiment brought about in a very short time by the efforts of politicians and Press. Up to 1904 most of the English had regarded the French with suspicion, with self-righteous disdain, as immoral, flighty, frivolous. France had been their enemy throughout the centuries ; and as for its morals—well, look at Paris ! The English had also up to that date considered Germans almost as honest, as serious, as home-loving as themselves. This was what they were taught.

Suddenly they were told to reverse their opinions. The French, they learned, were a noble folk, sadly misunderstood. Look how fond King Edward was of the Parisians, and they of him ! As for the Germans, they were trying to steal Britain's trade ; they aimed at building a navy to rival the British ; they were a danger, must be very carefully watched. If they wanted war . . .

Almost overnight the English obediently took up these new attitudes—hostility to Germans, friendliness with the French. The ten years' preparation for war began on both sides.

But with that I am not concerned now. What this proves for my present purpose is that nations ready to turn distrust into confidence, respect into suspicion, at the bidding of their rulers cannot be said to have characters ; and that since all nations are so pliable, the idea of national character is an absurdity.

But the belief in national characters is not merely absurd. It has a worse aspect. For it makes many people attribute to all the individual members of a nation the vices or virtues—more usually vices—which are supposed to be that nation's especial peculiarities. This is a frequent source of misunderstanding, hostility, mutual dislike.

I have heard an American newspaper correspondent, who worked in many countries during twenty-five years, say that he had friends or acquaintances of fifty-three nationalities, all of them, as individuals, kindly, tolerant, civilized. Why, asked Webb Miller, do all these people suddenly lose those qualities when their nationality is inflamed by fear or anger,

when they are told that this or that nation is their enemy ?

Overnight their friendly disposition drops from them ; they become suspicious, resentful, eager for massacre. Later, they will no doubt be told that it was all a mistake, no one wanted war at that moment, they put their money on the wrong horse.\* But the harm has been done.

This could not happen if the inhabitants of every country looked upon the inhabitants of other countries as fellow human beings, all basically alike, separated merely by superficial differences. It could not happen but for the notion that nationality is the great divider, the barrier that cannot be ignored—a notion which is artificial, illusory.

The belief in national patterns to which all members of nations more or less rigidly conform very seldom survives personal acquaintance. In the 1914 war Clemenceau said he was struck by the fact that nations were not at all as they were supposed to be. " The Englishman was noted for his calm, but English soldiers tended to be more hysterical than any others, the Americans were supposed to be so quick and they were so slow. The French were supposed to be gay and they were so solemn."

A young French soldier who taught American soldiers how to use the French machine-gun told Gertrude Stein, the novelist, that to his surprise they understood very quickly the mechanics of the gun, " but their physical reaction in using it was very slow, much slower than the French ; consequently it took more Americans to do anything than it did Frenchmen, and so of course it was done less quickly."

Persons who have never spoken to an American may imagine that all Americans are boastful, bend all their energies to getting rich quickly, and speak in an exaggerated nasal tone. Vast numbers of people in the United States suppose all the English to be haw-haw half-wits. Let such ignorants meet one man or woman who does not behave according to their imaginary pattern and they reverse their

\* Lord Salisbury's expression, in a speech on the Crimean War.

notion: they are convinced henceforward that all Americans or all English are like the one they met.

Only when one has moved freely and for long periods among many nationalities does the knowledge come that there are no "national character types." It seems to me that the duty of everyone who understands this is to make it known, and so to help in removing the most dangerous of the myths which in our time prevent the nations from settling down to make the best of life.

### III

## GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Geography lies at the root of history.—*Emmanuel Kant.*

THAT people who live under the same sky, feel the same heat and cold, are subject to the same conditions of existence, have certain characteristics in common, it would be ridiculous to deny.

Those who inhabit tropical lands are indolent, partly because exertion is more exhausting in damp heat, partly because they have no need to work hard for their food. Nature provides them with a minimum of toil.

Where the climate is mild, dry, sunny, never extremely hot or extremely cold, people are industrious, but not needlessly active. They are sociable, because they live mainly out of doors and in company. They have not the same sentiment of "home" which is strong among the inhabitants of countries with cold, raw climates which drive them indoors to sit round a stove or an open fire.

These will work hard to keep themselves warm, to force from the grudging soil and inclement weather conditions a sufficient livelihood. They will also take regular exercise. Emile Boutmy, the French writer, rightly attributes to the damp chill of the English atmosphere the English addiction to games.

Out-of-door life creates the desire for fine public buildings, large open spaces, communal institutions. Indoor life induces attention to the home, multiplication of domestic comforts and conveniences, and a corresponding indifference to appearances elsewhere, with a distrust of any departure from rigid individualism.

In excessively cold climates may be found populations



as lethargic and lazy as those of the tropics. The reason for this is that they have little to do during long winters and so become constitutionally inactive.

These climatic traits are not fixed and unalterable. They can be overcome, but not without difficulty, for they have become, in some degree, hereditary. "Climatic influences have affected the germ-plasm and been passed on." \* They do not, however, justify belief in "national character," since they can be modified and even eliminated by change of environment.

Character implies fixed traits, a uniform behaviour. Suppose you were to take a man of orderly habits, reasonable industry, and pleasant manners out of his usual environment and to set him down in entirely different conditions. If he became a different man, you would say he had "no character" to enable him to triumph over circumstances.

Apply this test to "national characters." So far as they can be said to exist at all, they will be seen to depend upon local influences, social or physical; to be the result of particular surroundings. Dr. Johnson, with his usual rough good sense, said of the manners of mountaineers that they were commonly savage, but were "rather produced by their situation than derived from their ancestors." Put a mountaineer into a city. If he does not alter, his children certainly will. Change the surroundings; the character is changed also.

The English who colonized the southern part of the American continent, so much warmer and moister than the northern, developed in a direction different from that taken by the settlers in New England, New York, and Pennsylvania. They preferred making others work to working themselves. They became self-indulgent, mentally inert.

It may be objected that they came from different stock, that they carried with them to Virginia and the Carolinas the habits and traditions of a governing class and a class accustomed to obey. That is true. That had something

\* A. C. Haddon, *The Races of Men*.

to do with it. But people drawn from that class who settled in the keener atmosphere of the northern part of the country worked as hard as anybody.

Even if the objection had to be allowed, it would serve as proof of my assertion that national character is an illusion. The settlers were all English. Why were they then so unlike among themselves? The answer is that different influences produce different characters. Within a nation there are many different influences; consequently there are many different characters.

Should certain influences be very strong and very evenly distributed, they may affect the bulk of a population. The soft climate of southern Ireland, plus the authority exercised by priests, makes the Irish inactive, unbusiness-like, procrastinating, irresolute. As settlers in Canada, Australia, the United States, they are energetic, enterprising, hard workers, capable business men.

Englishmen in many parts of Africa are liable to lose the habits induced by the climate of England and the discipline of public opinion. Many Americans who live in the softer climate of England throw off the frame of mind which America aims at fashioning, and become "more English than the English themselves" in their acceptance of inequality, deference to titles, the class system, hereditary right to wealth and privilege.

The Dutch in South Africa have nothing in common with the Dutch in Holland. They took with them from their native land a tradition of intense cleanliness, of household neatness and order. Settling in a country where water is scarce, they could not be continually washing either themselves or the floors. On their long waggon-treks, in search of soil to settle on, they lost also the house-pride that is so strong in Holland. The liking for society, natural to the inhabitants of a small, thickly-populated State, the Boers exchanged for that love of solitude which is usually found in people who live in an undeveloped empty country at a great distance from one another. If they could see on the horizon another farmer's smoke, they

complained of overcrowding ! Put in a position which enabled them to treat the natives as they pleased, many of them became brutal to a degree which was utterly foreign to, and which painfully shocked, the kindly people of Holland. Olive Schreiner, a Boer herself, was revolted by it.

Emigrants who carry with them the same formative influences that have veneered the surface of their nation into what can be mistaken for " national character " remain as they were in their own country. The French Canadians present an interesting case of arrested development. Religious teaching which amounts to terrorism has kept them in the seventeenth century. While the French in France have changed completely since that epoch, the French in Canada have altered very little. Yet in the United States those who have escaped from the fears and fetters of priestcraft very quickly lose their antiquated outlook.

It is in the United States that we find the strongest disproof of the theory of inborn national characters. There men and women from all nations become indistinguishable as soon as they can speak the English language in the American way. French, Germans, Italians, Scandinavians, almost all stocks become in the second generation American, without showing where they came from—unless they are artificially isolated and prevented from escaping into the new atmosphere, the fresh environment.

Where colonies exist—of Italians, Poles, or Ruthenians, for example ; where people from this or that country herd together, speak the language they have always spoken, read newspapers printed in that language, practise the same religion, bow to the authority of the same presbyters or priests, they will, in general, be what they were before they crossed the ocean—provided that the natural conditions into which they have removed are not very different from those which they left behind them.

A parallel to the French Canadians is found in the Southern Appalachian range of barren, rough hills running

through the States of Kentucky, Tennessee, and North Carolina. Here live people who are the purest English stock in the whole of the United States. They have, like the French Canadians, kept themselves in isolation, immune from the knowledge that has been acquired since they settled there, untouched by modern ideas. Among them flourish Fundamentalism (belief in the verbal inspiration, and therefore the literal truth, of the Bible) and many other notions that elsewhere have long ago been dismissed as nonsensical. They continue to think as their ancestors thought in the seventeenth century—because of their isolation.

All who expose themselves freely to the influences of their changed surroundings rapidly shake off those which moulded them in "the old country." They "become American," and it may be that by doing so they only exchange one set of limitations and shibboleths for another. Vigorous, even frantic efforts are made to form an American national character, but it is impossible to discover what idea of this character is in the minds even of those who are making the efforts. Some relate it to Abraham Lincoln, others to Stephen Decatur ("My country, right or wrong"). Principles supposed to be "inherent in the American character" are trampled on openly and daily.

"It is by the goodness of God," wrote Mark Twain, "that we have in our country those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practise either of them."

The American nation is, therefore, accused of being hypocritical. Unjustly accused, for the number who parade the first two of these "precious things" is small. Many profess their distrust of them—even contempt for them. The great mass do not think about them.

In one thing Americans of the Northern States from Massachusetts to Nevada tend to be alike—in their abounding vigour, their optimism, their readiness to make experiments in any direction. This is the result of the brisk, invigorating air they breathe. In the State of Maine the

climate is so severe as to diminish energy. In the South vigour is kept down by moist heat. The States bordering the Pacific are subject to conditions less enervating, but not conducive to great activity. San Francisco has in its population a large element which overcomes that tendency ; Seattle also. Most of the inhabitants of the States of Washington, Oregon, and California live at a lower pressure and with less intensity than their Eastern fellow-citizens.

In almost all European countries there is a recognized and well-marked difference between the people in the north and the people in the south. Prussians are more forceful than Bavarians, Milanese more energetic than Neapolitans, Yorkshiremen more pushing than the men of Sussex, Kent, or Hampshire. Normans, Bretons, and the small farmers of the Marne country work harder than the Gascons and the Provençales. The Basques of Spain are tougher, sturdier, than the Sevillians ; the miners of the Asturias endure toil that would annihilate the far less robust dwellers on the Mediterranean coast. In countries which have a uniform climate no such distinctions exist.

“ Geography lies at the root of history.” If Ireland had been three thousand miles distant from England, the Irish would have won their freedom to govern themselves without great difficulty. Had the American colonies of England been within a few hours’ steaming of English ports, as Ireland is, they would not have been allowed to break away and to proclaim the independent sovereignty of the United States. They would be part of the British Empire.

The power and splendour of Venice were due, not to the ambitious pride of the Doges or the Council of State, but to the location of the city of the canals ; it was exactly the right position for a trading centre between the Mediterranean and the East. England owed to the same good fortune its rise from the status of a second-class European Power. The discovery of America, the shifting of trade from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, made the English rich, gave them a commanding place among the nations. Already they had perforce established themselves as seamen.

The small area of their island drove them on to the water. Their soil was not naturally rich, a great part of it fit only for cattle and sheep-grazing. They became fishers, traders, colonizers ; and were thus ready to take up the opportunity chance threw in their way when commerce between Europe and America began.

Between the populations of North America and South America there is a wide difference. This was explained by Gustave Le Bon (a clever Frenchman, already quoted, who popularized psychological theories which he did not thoroughly understand) as being due entirely to "differences of character." That the South American Republics were "perpetually the victims of the bloodiest anarchy," and that "in spite of the amazing riches in their soil, they sank one after the other into ruin, bankruptcy, and despotism," he attributed to inherent contrasts in the mental and moral make-up of their inhabitants and those of the United States.\*

Le Bon overlooked the difference in climate between the northern States of the Union and the South American countries. He was apparently not aware that in the southern States, where the climate is more like that of the coast of South America, on which for the most part the cities stand, conditions were at one time not unlike those of Latin America. He also failed to allow for the extreme rarity in that part of the continent of politicians both honest and capable.

The Spaniards, it is true, not only caused degeneration of the native Indians, but produced a half-breed element in the population which is one of the most unfortunate results of crossing colour with white yet known. Still, there is little doubt that, if the government of the South American Republics had been taken in hand by men of the calibre of Washington, Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Abraham Lincoln, their history would have been far less lurid. Even the rule of Porfirio Diaz, corrupt and murderous though it was, kept order in Mexico for a quarter of a century ;

\* *L'Évolution Psychologique des Peuples.*

and, after the series of revolutions which followed his expulsion, the country settled down again under a firm and capable government.

The frequent upheavals in South America were not a consequence of popular character. The mass of the people had no taste for conspiracies and *coups d'etat*. All they wanted was to be left alone as far as possible and permitted to get what they could out of life. Financial greed and lust for power consumed the politicians who preyed upon them. An unceasing fight raged between the Ins and the Outs, with bullets instead of ballots and sword-strokes for speeches. The world, as usual, attributed to nations the character of a small section, assuming that the acts and words of leaders represented the sentiments and desires of the community. Hardly ever is that so.

Le Bon went so far as to assert that national institutions and governments were derived always from national character. They were "products of race." Yet in another book, *La Foule* (*The Crowd*), he proved that these products altered, that nations changed their political and religious beliefs frequently!

Among the proofs of this he laid stress on the history of the French between 1790 and 1820. From being monarchical they became revolutionary, then imperialist, then monarchical again. From Catholicism they swung over to Atheism, then to Deism, then back to Catholicism.

Had he traced further the development of French "character," Le Bon would have exhibited them dropping absolute monarchy for constitutional, then submitting to a dictator for twenty years, then settling down under republican government. He would also have recorded the weakening of that attachment to the Church, which seemed to him to grow more devoted than ever when the Bourbons were restored after the final defeat of Napoleon.

That was a misconception of history. All that happened in the twenties of the nineteenth century was that the Church regained a good deal of its power under Louis XVIII and Charles X, while it also became fashionable to practise

religion. There were still as many Atheists as there had been in the early seventeen-nineties, just as during the ascendancy of Atheism the number of Catholics remained about the same. In one period the Atheists got the upper hand ; in the other the Catholics had it. That was all. When Robespierre declared the existence of a Supreme Being, it was safer to be on his side. When the bishops began to be powerful again, it was wiser not to offend them.

To maintain, as Le Bon did, that

“ Peoples are guided in the main by the genius of their race—that is, by the inherited residue of qualities, of which the genius is the sum total,”

seems like standing the facts on their heads. There is, to begin with, no such definite classification as “ race ” known to ethnologists. Further, did Le Bon hold that “ the genius of the French ” made them religious or not ? That he never made clear.

Contradictions arose also when he tried to associate the genius of the Anglo-Saxons, both in Britain and the United States, with personal freedom. How did the press-gangs which forcibly seized men for naval service fit in with that characteristic ? Did the American character change when Prohibition was adopted, and then change again to repeal it ? How can the English and Australian liquor licensing regulations, and the fixing of hours during which liquor may be sold, be said to derive from the supposed English impatience of restraint ?

In each case the wishes or plans of a section have prevailed over the inert opposition of the mass. When the first British Education Act was passed in 1870, there was no demand for it among the mass of the nation. Had it been submitted to a special vote, and had there been vehement organized opposition, it would almost certainly have been defeated.

When institutions have existed for a long time and have become integral features in the life of a nation, they appear to be reflections of a national attitude of mind. That they



are not is indicated by the ease with which they can be superseded by other institutions.

When Arthur Young travelled through France shortly before the Revolution, the French people appeared to him to be devoted to the institution of monarchy. Nothing would have surprised him more than to be told that within a few years it would be abolished and a king beheaded.

In Russia during the 1914-18 War there was a confident belief that as soon as it ended the Tsardom would be constitutionalized. Scarcely anybody supposed it would be swept away ; not even Lenin anticipated the setting-up of a Socialist Republic.

Had a constitutional system been established the Russian people would have accepted it. They would then, according to Le Bon's theory, have displayed a Liberal character, as they had, according to the general assumption, been temperamentally in favour of absolutism so long as the Tsar remained an absolute monarch.

Now that the Socialist Republic (or rather Union of Republics) has lasted for nearly thirty years and become a national institution, the character of the nation must, if we take Le Bon for guide, be supposed to have altered in that direction. Yet we know that without Lenin the Bolshevik Revolution would not have happened. Quite possibly there would have been a return, for a period at any rate, to Tsarist despotism, which would again have been said to "derive from the Russian character" !

Of national institutions, the British Empire was during the nineteenth century the most striking in the world. Can it be argued that the Empire was an expression of British national character ? If that character is interpreted as inclining Britons towards colonization, how explain their refusal to emigrate as soon as the Unemployment Fund and the increase of social services made it possible for them to remain at home under conditions less disagreeable than before ? Or, if it be suggested that an element in the British character is pride in the Empire, we have only to read the reproaches which Prof. Sir John Seeley addressed to his

#### IV

### THE FOLLY OF GENERALIZATION

Nationality, I have always found, is mean ; is dishonest ; is ungenerous ; is incapable of candour ; and, being continually besieged with temptations to falsehood, too often ends by becoming habitually mendacious.—*De Quincey* (" *Opium-eater* "), 1821.

Racial philosophy with its race pride and race prejudices rots up the human personality far more effectively than all the drugs, drink, and obscenity in the world.—*John Langdon-Davies* in "*A Short History of the Future*."

THE truth seems to be that, whenever we hit upon some trait as being peculiar to this or that nation, we find, if we go into the matter more deeply, that it is common to many in all nations. If there do happen to be fixed peculiarities common to large numbers, they are found in districts where there has been little movement of population and where the people are clannish in their ways.

Thus Yorkshire folk are unlike Sussex folk. The Gascon of Southern France has little in common with the Norman, still less with the Breton. Westphalians in Germany are looked on as a separate race. Other Germans say of them *Mann kann mit einer Westfalen ein Sack Salz essen—und mann kennt ihr noch nicht* (You can eat a whole sack of salt with a Westphalian—that is, enjoy his hospitality over and over again—without getting to know him).

Even local character, however, proves as a rule to be subject to so many exceptions that it is scarcely more real than "national character." Yorkshire folk are supposed to be shrewdly cautious, yet they figure in the law courts frequently as wild gamblers of the Jimmy White type, and as credulous victims of gold-brick sellers. Lowland Scots are reputed close with their money, but are often public benefactors and generous givers privately. Highlanders

have had the name of spendthrifts, braggarts (like Alan Breck), hard drinkers. Yet many flourishing businesses in Scotland, England, and the United States have been founded and built up by clansmen, who have shown too that they can be bigoted teetotallers.

Where local characteristics prevail among large numbers, they are seen on examination to be the result of passing influences. Thus the slave-owning States in America produced a type of "gentleman" far removed from that of the more virile, more independent North—for the obvious reason that people who have everything done for them, who live on the labour of others, have softer manners, more time for the graces of life, and small inclination to hustle.

In Cornwall and certain other parts of England John Wesley's preaching sank so deeply into the hearts of the manual labouring class that they became almost communities of saints—for a short time. Once there were heroes in Swiss valleys, where Austrian tyranny was harsh; no people could be less heroic than the inhabitants of those districts to-day under mild republican rule.

It is amusing to remember that Austrians, who for a long time now have been thought of as charming, easy-going, laughter-loving, irresponsible, over-civilized, were until after the middle of the nineteenth century denounced as cruel despots. Palmerston considered them "the greatest brutes that ever called themselves by the undeserved name of civilized men" because of "their atrocities, their unmanly war waged against Hungarian women and children." George Meredith's novels *Sandra Belloni* and *Vittoria* show how mid-Victorian England felt about the Italians who were fighting for freedom and the Austrians who were trying to keep them a subject people.

Later Italians were execrated—for robbing Abyssinians of their liberty to govern themselves; while Austrians enjoyed general good-will. Nevertheless an Austrian Government (that of Dollfuss) committed against its own people the very same "brutal" acts which were stigmatized by Palmerston in the terms quoted when it was the

Hungarians who were being disciplined. Also, when Nazidom triumphed in Austria, the most brutal crimes were committed against Jews and others.

What conclusion are we to draw from this? Did the Austrian character alter between the middle and the end of the nineteenth century? Did it alter again in the twentieth? No; this could not have happened, for the nation in 1933 and again in 1938 was divided against itself. Part of it favoured the policy of violent repression, the other part was victim to that policy. We are forced then, to look on Palmerston's abuse as directed primarily against the Austrian rulers who ordered atrocities, and in less degree against the Austrian nation.

Likewise we must lay the responsibility for the violent repression of a large part of a nation in 1933-4 on Dictator Dollfuss and the class, composed of wealthy, land-owning, and privileged persons, whose nominee he was. The ruffians guilty of cruel and thieving behaviour in 1938 were only a section, brutalized by Nazi doctrines and condemned by many of their country-people. In neither case could the mass of Austrians be held directly responsible for what was done in their name.

Had they been consulted in the nineteenth century as to whether the Hungarians demanding Home Rule should be treated as noxious animals, and had they voted in favour of their rulers' acts, it would still be unfair to blame them severely. For humanity in the mass is unhappily always at the mercy of glib tongues, voices with a thrill in them, wild and whirling words.

What the mass desires—let me repeat this; it is important—is to gain a living by not too arduous toil, to live in fair comfort and without constant painful anxiety as to the future, to be as much as possible left alone by officials and other uniformed pests.

To what goes on in the regions whence laws and administrative orders proceed the mass is incuriously blind and deaf. Schools do not teach children how their country is governed. Newspapers have more reasons for hiding than for revealing

the truth. About home affairs the minds of the masses are hazy. Now and again they grasp an issue, grow tired of an Administration, lose patience with a leader. Usually they have as little understanding of economic or political conflicts as the Iowa farmers of whom William Jennings Bryan used to tell.

While Bryan was conducting his "sound money" campaign, he spoke at a village meeting and mingled with his hearers as they went out. He overheard two of them discussing what he had told them. "Yes," said one of them, "I guess he's right about round money. Square money 'ud tear holes in yer pockuts."

As to foreign affairs the mind of the mass is not hazy, but blank. Italians knew as little about Abyssinia as the British did about the Boer Republics when they were added to their Empire. What exactly the League of Nations had power to do, how it came into being, and what collective security might mean, not one in a hundred persons could tell in any country except the Scandinavian States and Russia, where such things are taught in school.

Nations are reeds shaken by winds from this or that quarter—and not "thinking reeds," as Pascal suggested. They appear to give their support to any individual or any group that demands it with sufficient vehemence. They take the line of least resistance. The English in the sixteenth century were, by order, first Roman Catholic, then English Catholic, then Protestant, then Catholic again, then Protestant and Catholic mixed, finally Protestant solely. As we have seen already, the French in the first half of the nineteenth century went through much the same kaleidoscope politically—had government by an oligarchy, government by a despotic emperor, government by a restored Bourbon, then Napoleon again, then Bourbons again, then an Orleanist king, then a republic, followed by twenty years of imperial dictatorship, then a republic once more.

What the mass of people do in all countries is to leave themselves in the hands of those who by their vigour,

coupled with ability or cunning, push themselves to the front in national affairs. The mass never want a particular kind of leader. They did not want a Cromwell in the England of the seventeenth century ; they would have been content with Charles I if he had not stupidly made himself impossible, just as later on they were content with Charles II, who was cunning enough not to let them know what he was doing. Nor did the mass in France after the Revolution want a Napoleon, but, when he "wangled" himself into power, they bore his yoke with patience till he foolishly united all Europe against himself and was thrown out.

The English are generally credited with an instinct for democracy, yet England is the only country where a House of Parliament exists on a hereditary—that is, an anti-democratic—basis. Whenever we analyse supposed national characteristics or see them suddenly tested by events, we find them slipping away, discomfiting expectations, giving place maybe to wholly opposite behaviour.

Fifty years ago the national character of the Germans was generally supposed to be intelligent, kindly, peaceable, gently patriotic, home-loving, music-loving, studious, agreeable. From 1914 to 1919, your life was not safe in Britain, France, or the United States if you did not call them bloodthirsty savages, cruel, aggressive, unfit to be in Europe. From 1933 to 1939 they were poor fish, trembling at the nod of pinchbeck despots, enthused by flatulent oratory, forced to shout in obedient unison their approval of whatever their tyrants might do. Then they became devils again.

Now if a man or woman behaved one day in a pleasant, orderly, sensible manner ; the next day with domineering brutality and pitiless violence ; and on yet another occasion seemed cowed, slavish, ludicrously sentimental in some moods, in others vengefully sadist, you would say of them that they had no character, that they were swayed by gusts of feeling induced by what they heard or read. I maintain that to be the truth about the Germans—and about all nations.

All react in the same way to certain stimuli—those, for example, of war-time. To other excitations some are readily susceptible, some not so readily, a few not at all. The degree of susceptibility depends, not upon innate disposition, but on habits, on circumstances, on the influence of a small number of strong minds or characters opposed to those of the mass.

It would be impossible to persuade the French to experiment with Prohibition, as Americans did, (1) because very few of them drink hard liquor, (2) because, for that reason, French women are not hostile to alcohol, (3) because in France, where education is based on logic, neither men nor women can see any possible interaction between politics and personal habits.

It would be equally impossible at present to stir up among Americans sentiments towards Canadians such as the French were taught to harbour against Germans; but it would be easy if Canada were to fill up, if there should ever be the same number of millions of people on each side of the International Line.

Italians responded with docile frenzy to the cry that Abyssinian sovereignty must be destroyed. They were despised and abused by the rest of the world, the English included. Yet only thirty-six years before the English themselves were shrieking with similar fury for the extermination of the Boer Republics, earning the same contempt and dislike from other nations. If they are not now in a mood for colonial adventure, the reasons are:—

(a) that their rulers do not want more territory and make no attempt to arouse the mood; and

(b) that, even if the attempt were to be made, it would probably fail on account of the efforts of a handful of writers and politicians to show how foolish and criminal such adventures are.

A handful of Italian writers free to publish their views might have saved Italy from the Abyssinian infamy, but they did not exist in 1935 any more than they existed in Britain during the last years of the nineteenth century.

Here we come upon the truth that what is called "national character" is the character imparted to a nation by its leading men, those whom it follows, obeys, admires. Only upon a small proportion does this character have actual effect.

The Italians, until the elevation of Mussolini, were regarded by the world as easy-going, pleasure-loving, rather stupid, but kindly. Then they were believed to be brutally intolerant, efficient in a mechanical fashion, savagely cruel. What happened was that elements which can accurately be so described were let loose and given encouragement. As in Germany, dictatorship relied for its stability mainly on the lowest of the population—on men whose delight was in bullying, torturing, killing.

This is the most appalling injury done to mankind by tyrants who disregard all the decencies that civilization has gradually imposed on rulers. They give a free hand to ruffians whom it is the aim of civilized Governments to keep sternly in check. By these criminals nations are judged, though they form but a small class and are in no real sense representative.

A comical result of dictatorship in Italy was that many Italians showed their respect for Mussolini by trying to look like him. There was a distinct Mussolini type. It will be seen, not in Italy alone, but in the Italian restaurants of London, in the Italian quarters of New York and other American cities. Waiters and labourers swelled themselves out, knitted their brows fiercely. It is possible for a leader who can impress himself on plastic imaginations to influence not only men's characters, but also their appearance.

Women's characters, too, are liable at times to develop in certain directions under warmth of admiration for a national hero. After the Four Years' War Mr. Lloyd George enjoyed for a short time heroic honours. As "the man who won the war," he won also the enthusiastic gratitude of women; those who had votes voted almost solidly for his return to power.



His electoral victory, gained on the catchwords " Hang the Kaiser " and " Make the Germans pay," had, among other results, that of making the world believe the British character to be unforgiving, stupidly revengeful, unwilling to face realities, unable to take any but a short-sighted, small-minded view. As soon as the influences brought into play for the purposes of the election were allowed to die down different feelings prevailed. " Hang the Kaiser " became a joke to everybody (as it always was to Mr. Lloyd George). The impossibility of extorting from the Germans the grotesquely huge sums demanded was a cause of shrugged shoulders, not of angry disappointment.

Here was a perfect illustration of the truth that " national character " is in reality the reflection of the moods, methods, or principles of national leaders. This will be discussed, with further illustrations, later on.

## “EXTREMELY ARBITRARY”

Although between distant peoples the differences may seem so great that we mistake them for distinct species, we find on closer examination that all seem to merge into one another.—*Friedrich Blumenbach* (1752–1840), *founder of scientific anthropology*.

Men who deserve to be called men obey only their reason, but they are not French rather than German, they are European, they are Chinese, they exist everywhere, and all the truths conceived by human reason exist for these universal men.—*Lanson*, “*Histoire de la Littérature Française*.”

If it could be proved that any nation had a “character,” if it were noticeable that all who belonged to it displayed certain peculiarities of thought, conduct, and emotion, the cause would have to be looked for in education.

Not merely in what schools were teaching, but in the methods employed, either in conjunction with schools or outside of them, to plant certain ideas in all young minds, to influence immature imaginations, to encourage or check the play of developing intelligence.

That such methods, added to school training, might produce a generation of adolescents all ready to think, act, and feel in much the same way is not merely possible. It has been done in Russia and in Germany.

Among Russians and Germans one can say with assurance that generations have grown up with an outlook on life entirely different from that of their parents. This has been accomplished in a very short time by intensive methods of forcing into the heads of the young what the rulers wished to put there. As adults, they have the same ideas and influences sprayed unceasingly over them. If several generations were treated in this fashion, then a national character might be formed, and might persist. No such

character has been formed up to now, but it is not impossible that this could happen.

It has happened often that masses of people have been induced to fall for short periods of time into certain attitudes of mind, to inoculate themselves with certain sentiments, to put their imaginations at the service of this or that demagogue or warrior. But these have been fleeting adventures.

The Ephesians could not shout for ever “ Great is Diana ” at the bidding of priests, alarmed for the temple dues on which they lived at ease. The Athenians forgot Cleon as soon as he had been killed in battle. The Crusades, begun with religious fervour, soon degenerated into sordid economic warfare. The Hungarians could not remain at the emotional level to which Maria Theresa raised them in the eighteenth century, any more than the Italians could continue throughout the nineteenth to be thrilled by Garibaldi’s romanticism and Mazzini’s ideals.

Often we hear that religion is a potent influence in moulding “ national character.” It was said to be so in Spain. Had this been true Christianity would have gained little credit. A recent writer on the Spanish character said that Spaniards set beauty above practical use, held “ sentiment to be more important than action ; honour very often more important than success ; love and friendship more important than one’s job.” He also stated that both sides in the civil war shot prisoners as a matter of course ; this was the Spanish tradition !

Beauty, sentiment, honour, love, friendship—words, words, words ! Helpless fellow-countrymen butchered—because it was usual ! And religion alleged to be the chief factor in creating that mentality !

Alleged without proof, however. For over large parts of Spain the people, as soon as they dared, showed what was their feeling towards the Church—a feeling of deep hatred.

Religions have in some ages produced among their sincere adherents certain emotional attitudes, certain states of mind. Islam has done this among Arabs and Africans.

Thirteenth-century England was affected in this way by the Catholic Church. The same efforts had to be made then which French and Italian bishops make to-day to stop "appearances of the Blessed Virgin" from being advertised, and local saints from being worshipped and resorted to for cures. The English were reckoned among the most faithful of the Church's sheep. But this supposed "national characteristic" proved to be no more than the result of industrious teaching by a powerful ecclesiastical caste. Such teaching being suspended, sanity regained its sway.

This happened more recently and more strikingly in Russia. So long as the Orthodox Church had possession of the minds of the peasants, who numbered four-fifths of the population, so long as the priest and the policeman represented the Tsardom in its two aspects—spiritual and secular—so long were the masses induced to believe that their earthly and their future happiness depended entirely on obedience to the "Little Father" and scrupulous attention to certain ceremonial observances.

As soon as they were freed from priestly domination most of them gave up the observances, and so belied one of the elements in their "national character" on which Europe outside Russia was generally agreed. They showed that they were no more a "religious" people than the English in the sixteenth century, who, as we have seen, changed their faith over and over again in consonance with the wishes of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth; and did not, apparently, mind whether they were Protestant or Catholic, Roman or Anglican, subject to Papal or monarchical authority, prelatist or Presbyterian, any more than they minded whether they were ruled over by Danish, Norman, Angevin, Plantagenet, Welsh, Scottish, Dutch, or German sovereigns.

Even after Wesley had instilled into a good many English natures a craving for holiness which had been entirely absent from Puritanism, religion remained in England rather a social—even a political—than a spiritual activity. The English have not been, in fact, so religious

nation as the French, in spite of the notion, sedulously cultivated by certain of the English who like to consider their nation the chosen of the Lord, that the French are “ godless.” Even the French Canadians are convinced of that ; their priestly teachers know all about Voltaire and the Revolution and the separation of Church from State, and not much about anything else.

With the same fervour Austrian priests warned their parishioners to beware of the German spirit, the spirit of Luther and the Reformation, and so kept the Austrians Catholic and careless, lacking those sturdy qualities which independence of thought engenders. Yet this was no “ national ” trait, since Austrians who freed themselves from the yoke of ecclesiasticism displayed these very qualities and proved their possession of sound, practical ability.

This same change from slackness to responsibility is seen, as I have mentioned before, in Irish people who leave their country to settle in the United States, Canada, or South Africa and who at the same time refuse to submit longer to the authority of the Church (though they may continue to attend its services). It is often said of an Irishman in such circumstances that he “ changes his character ” ; this would be an impossibility if it were fixed in him as an inheritance, as an integral part of his personality. What is believed by so many to be a failing rooted in nationality is thus shown to be no more than a result of teaching directed to certain ends.

If the former explanation were the true one, it would follow that an Irish child brought up by foster-parents of another nation in another religion, or in none at all, must be in disposition and temperament exactly like the Irish who remain in Ireland. We all know by experience that this does not happen. Environment is the most powerful moulder of individuality. Material conditions shape our lives far more than hereditary influence.

In our own time we have seen effusions of feeling similar to those cited, but on a larger scale. Among vast numbers

of Russians there was created within twenty years a spirit very different from that which was the result of Tsarism—a spirit of pride in ownership of the country, a spirit of joy in freedom from monarchical and aristocratic despotism. In Germany and Italy there was spread widely among the populations a religious faith in the possession of superhuman attributes by Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, with a consequent approval of all that they did or said.

If in these countries the process of manufacturing opinion were continued for a hundred, or even fifty years, national characters might be produced. Remote as is the likelihood of that happening, it cannot be ruled out as chimerical. But this, which has never occurred yet, would be a totally different method of producing national character from that which is believed in by so many people at present.

The prevailing notion is that national characters are derived from remote ancestors ; that the moulds were made long ago and are unalterable ; and that, by virtue of ancestry, entire nations are shaped in them. Although this notion is usually credited to the Frenchman Count Gobineau, and the development of it to the Ulsterman, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, it is very much older than that. Not as a scientific theory, but as a popular hallucination.

The English, for example, when they had become powerful at sea, delighted to recall their " Viking ancestors " and to think of themselves as a nation of " jolly Jack Tars " (although nine out of ten suffered painfully from seasickness if they ever ventured on the waves which they claimed to rule).

Germans have made a cult of the blond, ruthless Teuton. Italians are capable of persuading themselves that they are " the heirs of the ancient Romans." A prominent American, Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, has claimed for his fellow-countrymen an innate conservatism, due to the " habits of political thinking of the Anglo-Saxon colonists who were the original builders of the nation." This bold assertion, disregarding the fact that four-fifths of the

American nation are not in any way connected by descent with Anglo-Saxons, dates back to 1908, before the Prohibition experiment and other startling departures from conservatism in the United States. But as Dr. Butler reprinted it in 1937\* it must represent his considered view.

Ethnologically there is no basis for the fancy that any large nation can trace a “ pure ” descent. Blumenbach wrote on this :—

“ The varieties of mankind which have been accepted by distinguished men have proved extremely arbitrary.”

Friedrich Muller put it more bluntly, when he declared : “ Race is an empty phrase, an utter swindle.” Israel Zangwill was no less emphatic when he pointed out that

“ the Italians are a medley of all the races whose slaves poured into Rome between 100 B.C. and A.D. 300. Turn Time’s kinematograph back far enough, and the Germans are found to be French and the French Germans—indeed, Bismarck, looking at their bodies on a battle-field, confessed that there was little difference even now.”

Leroy-Beaulieu came to the same opinion :—

“ What nationality among the nations of Europe and America is based on race ? Is it England with her Bretons, Saxons, Danes, and Normans ? Is it France with her Cimbri, Gauls, Iberians, Germans, and Latins ? Is it Germany where the Teutons have interbred in the West with the Celts and in the East with the Slavs to such an extent that in many district the blue eyes and fair hair of the Germans are no longer to be met with in the majority of the population ? ”

Once it was thought possible to divide human beings into the short-headed and the long-headed (*brachy*-and *dolichocephalic*). Now most of them are what is called by ethnologists “ mesati-cephalous ”—neither one thing nor the other. Since the neolithic period races and nations

\* *The American as He Is*. Scribners, New York.

have intermingled freely. The distinguishing physical marks of their original ancestry have disappeared.

This took a long time. Far more quickly can acquired mental habits be discarded. Within fewer than a hundred years of their being driven from Spain, where they had been leaders in all civilizing sciences and arts, the Arabs had relapsed into a state of ignorant squalor. The Scandinavians have in the course of little more than a generation given up the practices of formal religion. Americans have transformed themselves from the most Puritanical into the most tolerant of nations—tolerant, that is to say, towards religious practices.

Little wonder that the German writer, Count Koudenhove-Kalergi, should say :—

“As soon as one takes up the race question, the division of races or the enrolment of a people in this or that group, endeavouring to discover principles based on anatomy, language, or religion, one encounters more and more trouble, confusion, and riddles without answer. One meets nothing but dissolving views and empty phantoms.”

Prof. Huizinga, distinguished Dutch philosopher, whose reputation is acknowledged far beyond his own country, sees his way more clearly through the fog of invented “facts” and illogical reasoning. He says flatly (*In the Shadow of To-morrow*) :—

“The belief that character is determined by race lacks scientific support. . . . It is uncertain and indefinite even when surrounded by the necessary reservations.”

In another part of the same book he wrote :—

“From the outset rejected as untenable by genuine science, the doctrine of racial superiority has carried on its existence for half a century in a sphere of romantic fancy and sham erudition until political circumstances placed it on a pedestal from which it now dares to dictate ‘scientific’ truths.

“The argument of race in cultural conflicts is



always self-praise. . . . The motive is always exaltation of self and kin over others, at the expense of others.”

Each individual man and woman in a nation is moulded by influences that are active from birth onwards, even before birth. Groups of individuals subject to the same influences will be more or less alike, seldom sufficiently alike to justify their being credited with a common character. When, like the Appalachians and French Canadians, they have had intense pressure applied to them, they do show a general resemblance to one another. Those are extreme cases. As a rule, diversity triumphs over the thrust of circumstances ; no single type is produced.

It is so rare for all surrounding influences to exert the same pressure that for the most part they cancel out ; or one is perhaps more powerful than all the rest. Family, school, companions, business, profession, recreations, pull different ways, leaving most men and women without any distinct shape, any definable personality.

Take the members of a family who have been brought up together, sent to the same schools, treated by their parents with equal favour ; can we discover in them a “ family character ” ? Very seldom. How then is it possible to believe that millions of people, brought up in all sorts of homes, sent to all sorts of schools, exposed to the impact of all manner of circumstances, can inherit and display a “ national character ” ?

The supposition that they do is largely based, I think, on their speaking the same language, and a language foreign to others. When we meet Italians or Germans, and hear them speak Italian or German, we know what they are ; we credit them at once with the character we have learned to consider appropriate. If we meet an Italian or a German who speaks our own language fluently and correctly, we may know from his slight accent that he is a “ foreigner,” but we cannot place him with any certainty. Even if we saw him often and became close friends, we might not be able to find out for ourselves, without being told, to what

nation he belonged. His "character" would not inform us.

We do not hear of the "characters" of nations which are composed of groups speaking different languages. There is no illusion of a Swiss "national character." French Swiss, Italian Swiss, and German Swiss have their own districts, they have not coalesced. Yet Swiss citizens from different "cantons" get on well enough together and feel they have a common interest, without cherishing any mystical belief that they are distinct from and superior to the citizens of other States.

Here we find refutation of the theory that language is the bar to international comradeship. Nations, it is often said, will not give up the notion of their separateness until they have adopted some world-speech, either one of the three which are widely spoken already (English, Russian, Spanish) or an invented one, such as Esperanto.

The Swiss teach us that this is not necessary, although it would be of value. They do not all speak the same language. They have no common tongue. Yet, because they are taught that French-speaking, German-speaking, and Italian-speaking Swiss make up the Swiss Republic, they accept as fellow-citizens people with whom they cannot talk. Difference of language, therefore, need not stand in the way of friendly union among all men, any more than differences of physical traits which are supposed to indicate differences of character.

That there are certain likenesses still common among the people of certain countries is undeniable. It is taken by many for proof that there must be mental likenesses as well. This requires examination.

There is a general resemblance among the Japanese, and to a less degree among the Chinese. Eskimos are almost all of one facial type. In Scandinavia very fair hair is common. In South Italy black hair predominates. Scottish highlanders who come of families that have not married out of their districts or clans are high-cheekboned. Arabs are distinguished by aquiline features. Negroes in

parts of Africa where they have been undisturbed have uniformly flat noses and protruding lips.

These physical peculiarities persist, however, only as long as there is no mixture of blood. All the larger European nations have mingled so many different stocks that they have entirely lost any distinctive physical attributes they may once have possessed. In all their lands diverse types are seen ; there is no prevailing cast of countenance, bodily appearance, or colour of hair. It is easy to mistake Germans for Frenchmen, Italians for English, a Spaniard for a Dutchman, a Belgian for a Pole, a Russian for a Swiss.

Emerson wrote in 1856 after his visit to Europe that

“ each variety shades down imperceptibly into the rest and you cannot draw the line where a race begins or ends. Moreover, though we flatter the self-love of men and nations by the legends of pure races, all our experience is of the gradation and resolution of races, and strange resemblances meet us everywhere.” \*

Since that was written, movement has become easier, more general. The mixture of races has been intensified. The “ melting-pot ” method of forming or enlarging nations has more effectually smoothed out “ national types ” (if any have ever existed).

We are thus forced to conclude that only those nations which have remained aloof keep any common physical resemblance.

“ A racial type is but an artificial concept, though long continued geographical isolation does tend to produce a general uniformity of appearance.” †

As soon as races or nations mix freely with others they lose that uniformity. This is proved beyond question if we look into the persistence of racial types.

In South Russian and in Poland under the Tsardom, when Jews were segregated in certain towns, such as Berdeechov, or in certain quarters of cities (Warsaw, for

\* *English Traits.*

† Prof. A. C. Haddon, *The Races of Men.*

example), the hook nose and almond-shaped eye marked nearly every one of them, though these facial traits did not distinguish them so clearly as did their dress—a long black garment from neck to heels and a flat, shapeless cap. In Germany and Austria, where less severe segregation was in force, they were not so distinguishable. In France and Britain, where they kept to themselves far less, large numbers ceased to be of any special Jewish type ; they were merged (save in districts where they still preferred to remain separate) in the general population.

Among coloured folk who cease to be “ pure ” negroes the same gradual effacement of negro features and hue occurs. Villages in the Southern States of America that have been left to the black race are inhabited by owners of tightly-curling black hair and typical negro features. In Harlem, the coloured district of New York, there is no distinctive type to be discovered. All shades of colour, all descriptions of feature, may be seen. Both Jews and negroes retain their original appearance only when they persist in holding themselves apart, or when they are prevented, either by remoteness or human prohibition, from mixing with Gentile or white populations.

It is impossible to doubt, with the experience of the United States in view, that Chinese and Japanese are equally liable to become merged in surrounding groups. Often one notices children in America who faintly suggest an Oriental origin. These may in time become as numerous as the Americans who show traces of an Indian strain.

No evidence can prove more clearly the illusion of national character, inherent and indestructible, than that which jumps up at every step one takes in the United States. Yet there we see a fresh illusion of the kind being deliberately manufactured. We see marks of nationality being rubbed off the children of immigrants and other marks made in their place. “ Racial and national traits ” disappear before our eyes. Fresh loyalties, a new allegiance, are created to take the place of the old.

There is nothing in this to surprise anybody who has

given thought to the matter. Physically we are shaped by generations of ancestors. If all have conformed to one type, we are of that type. If our ancestry is varied, we cannot be placed in any category.

Mentally, ninety-nine out of every hundred of us are the result of environment. Shakespeare, as usual, contributes plain common sense on the matter :—

“ It is certain that either wise bearing or ignorant carriage is caught, as men take diseases, one of another.” \*

Early impressions, education, companionship, mould the intellects and imaginations of almost everybody. An Englishman, an American, a Frenchman, a German, a Chinese, who grows up in simple comfort among intelligent people accustomed to use their minds, to accept nothing as true merely because it is commonly believed—people with civilized tastes and agreeable manners—such a man is likely to belong to that international society which consists of the men and women just described, no matter what their nationality may be.

Bring up another man in a slum, among drunkards and wastrels ; sap his bodily strength and weaken his mind by insufficient or bad food, mechanical toil, excessive hours, leisure spent in foolish, if not vicious, ways ; and, whatever “ national character ” he is supposed to possess, he will most probably become a criminal or a drifter from bad to worse. All people, when they are exposed to the same influences, react in much the same way. They are shaped by their surroundings. To attribute diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences is, declared John Stuart Mill, “ the most vulgar of all vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the effects of social and moral influences on the human mind.” †

Seeing that looks are so soon and so strongly modified and altered by the mingling of races and nations, it is evident

\* *Henry IV*, Part II, Act V, Scene 1.

† *Principles of Political Economy*.

that thought and feeling must be changed by the same cause; these are far more susceptible to change than physical characteristics can ever be. It may take generations to transform outward appearances ; opinions, ideals, beliefs, can be superseded in a very short time.

## VI

### GROWTH OF THE IDEA

All nations are more or less a mixture of races and peoples blended together. All of us, be we French, Russians, Germans, English, Italians, Spanish, Hungarians, Greeks, Roumanians, or Bulgarians, are half-bred, of mixed blood.—*Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, eminent philosophic economist.*

THE first distinct appearance in history of the illusion of national character is among the Jews of the Old Testament. Their priest-kings kept a hold over them by saying they were the Chosen Race, chosen by Jah-veh, a blood-thirsty, implacable deity, to wipe out the heathen, who possessed desirable territories. For their yielding to that deception their descendants have suffered ever since.

Foolish and criminal as we may hold persecution of the Jews to be, there is no denying they have in large degree invited it by their practice of exaggerated nationalism. Through the ages they have kept themselves apart, have held that marriage with Gentiles is sinful, have clung to antiquated religious ceremonies, have cultivated a spiritual pride, a disdain for the rest of mankind, which are as impolitic as they are absurd.

Owing to persecution, this policy has been maintained as a defensive measure. It is a sad vicious circle which liberal-minded Jews could break but for the domination of orthodox traditionalists. Here is an example. In Soviet Russia the disabilities they suffered under the Tsars were removed at once. No distinction was made between them and the other citizens of the U.S.S.R. Everything possible was done to provide them with means of livelihood when it became a crime to buy cheap with the object of selling at a profit.

They can attend synagogue if they wish to; their

children can be taught in their vernacular ; where they live in groups of families, they have their own local government ; they can keep up their peculiar customs and retain their separatist culture.

For this many of them were grateful, many disinclined to prolong their separatism. But from Jews in general outside the U.S.S.R., and from large numbers inside it, came resentful complaints :—

“ The policy of the Soviet Union meets with persistent opposition, and even denigration, from the world-wide organization of the Zionists, among whom the building-up of the ‘ national home ’ in Palestine brooks no rival.” \*

Speaking to the members of a Jewish society in London (the Maccabees) I told of a conversation I had with a Jewish woman in Moscow.

“ Times are changed for you,” I said, “ and happily changed,” for I recollected the treatment of Jews by the Tsardom.

“ Indeed, yes,” she answered. “ My husband no longer thinks of himself as a Jew, but as a man.”

I felt a wave of icy resentment flowing towards me from my audience. They hated the idea that Jews should put aside their Jewishness.

People win liking, admiration, in the measure of their being “ good mixers,” disregarding barriers set up by ignorance or prejudice, showing that they recognize no essential differences between human beings, only variations due to circumstance. The English were unpopular in Europe during part of the nineteenth century because most of them who travelled were inclined to assume their own superiority to “ foreigners.” For the same reason it was hard to like Chinese intellectuals educated on the old lines.

By studying to maintain a Jewish mentality, to preserve unaltered Jewish traditions, to keep the Jewish nation apart from the other nations, instead of taking a broad out-

\* Beatrice and Sidney Webb in *Soviet Communism*.



look and being content to form part of the human race, the Jews have courted disaster. Their clannishness has provoked catastrophe. As an object-lesson in the unhappy consequences of deliberately forming and perpetuating a "national character" the Jews are Exhibit Number One.

The Greeks had no conception of nationality. It is true they called people whose language they did not understand "barbarians" (babblers), but that was partly impatience and partly humour. Their loyalty was to a city and their fellow-citizens. There was no Greek nation. Nor was it suggested that the inhabitants of one city were of purer blood (if a nonsensical expression may be pardoned) than those of others, or that all citizens descended from the same stock. The legend of Cadmus, supposed to be the ancestor of Athenians, received no practical application, nor was any mystic bond believed to unite Spartans or Corinthians, Argives or Thebans. Men could change their citizenship and change back again, as Alcibiades did. They might be proud of their city's loveliness, or its success in the Olympic games; of victories won by its army or fleet; they did not boast, so far as we can judge from their literature, of their individual value as Athenians, Spartans, and so on.

Rome, too, began as a city-state and remained so even under the Empire. The Republic was open to anyone who cared to qualify for membership. If a Roman had been congratulated on his innate superiority to all other people, by virtue of having been born in Rome, he would scarcely have understood the compliment. He might acknowledge the advantages of Roman citizenship—under the Empire he certainly did that; he might feel that he had a high tradition to keep up; very likely he praised the justice administered by the Roman law-courts, the orderliness of the public assemblies, the dignity of the Senate, the excellence of the training in arms which the soldiers of the Republic received. Later, when the Imperial power was a protection to Roman citizens throughout the Roman world, the value of that citizenship was enhanced. But there still was absent any idea that it conferred merit,

that it roped off those who could claim it, as Saint Paul did, from the rest of humanity. Saint Paul, indeed, was far more ready than his fellow-Jews who were not Roman citizens to throw down the partitions between different groupings of mankind. Rome spread the idea of universality, not that of separatism.

There became common, it is true, a disposition to class "barbarians" as lower in the scale of human values than civilized people. This was nourished by fear; it was rooted, not in any feeling that they were as nations congenitally inferior, but in the plain fact that they were uncivilized and dangerous. When they chose to come into line, to adopt orderly habits, to live by industry instead of marauding, to cease warring upon civilization and contribute to its common defence, they were welcomed; after a period of trial they were put on an equal footing. The Gauls, the British, the Belgæ, and the rest were weaned by the Empire from a narrow national—or rather, tribal—allegiance to a loyalty far wider. They learned to recognize in all men possible fellow-citizens, to call none common or unclean.

The same lesson was taught by the Christian Church, though in a sense less tolerant and wise. No prejudice had been felt by the Romans against Peoples which had developed civilizations of their own, however alien these might be to the civilization of Rome; they were treated with courtesy, even accepted as allies. Their religions were not interfered with. Many of their gods were enrolled among the Roman divinities. The Christian Church never reached that degree of forbearance. It was not economically possible that it should, seeing it had a religion of its own to sell. All men were eligible for the benefits it offered, none could be considered to exist outside the possibility of salvation. But if they neglected to embrace it, if they had already a religion which satisfied them, then they were denounced as infidels, pagans, enemies of the Christian God. What this meant was that the Church wished to enrol and tax them.

Still, the influence of Christianity was decidedly opposed

to the division of mankind into groups supposed to be separated from each other by marked hereditary variations of character or temperament. All Christians were of one family, with God as the father of all. At no time has so large a part of the world been free from that harmful supposition of national character as during the Age of Faith.

Until the sixteenth century the tie uniting all Christians in common fealty to the Pope was stronger than any national bond. Throughout Europe the inhabitants of different countries knew they were essentially the same. A native of any of them could travel through all the rest and find identical ceremonies being performed in all churches, exactly the same ceremonies to which he was accustomed at home. He would be given food and shelter, if he needed them, in convents and monasteries whose ways were familiar to him. Everywhere the institutions of Catholicism were those among which he had been brought up. Everywhere he found that with many whom he met he could converse in Latin, the language understood by all who had received any kind of education.

All this weakened the national idea, the delusion that people are divided off into groups having little in common.

Kings might, for their own purposes, require their armies to fight one another. But, after all, fighting was the business of soldiers, it never went on for long at a time; it was governed by certain rules which took off the worst of its sharp edges. The Hundred Years' War between England and France never reached a high pitch of slaughter, did not lay waste great stretches of country, went on in a leisurely fashion, with constant long intervals. The horrors of the Thirty Years' War were possible only after the break-up of the Church, when men were released from the obligations of a common faith and were urged to regard their opponents as God's foes.

Necessary as the break-up had become, salutary as many of its effects were, it had also evil consequences. One of these prepared the way for the illusion of national character by putting into men's minds the belief that between

Protestants and Catholics there were differences, moral as well as intellectual. Nations which adhered to the old faith were taught to shudder at the wickedness of those which adopted the Reformation. From this it was an easy step for nations to believe the worst of their rivals and the best of themselves.

Protestants of fiery zeal took up a *Hew-Agag-in-pieces-before-the-Lord* attitude. Oliver Cromwell, adopting Hebrew spirit and phraseology, made the stupid boast that the English were "a people with the stamp of God upon them, whose appearance and whose providences were not to be outmatched by any story."

Conceit led to dreams of conquest. Every war became a crusade in which each side denounced the other as an enemy to God and the human race. In spite of the endeavours of the Roman Empire and the Christian Church to kill it, the belief in distinctive nationality was not dead (poisonous weeds have persistent vitality); it went into cold storage (except among the Jews) until both those institutions had, one after the other, lost their commanding positions in the world. It was brought out again by kings who sometimes found it useful to identify their intrigues and robberies with supposedly national desires, as they had before occasionally identified them with religious causes.

In general monarchs did not find it necessary to do this; they could count upon their subjects' loyalty to their persons and obedience to their commands. Henry V made no pretence that the English were eager for war with France. He made war simply in the hope of regaining possessions in that country, which would do the English no good whatever. The first time a popular feeling was stirred up among the English in favour of war was in Elizabeth's reign, and that was more Protestant than national. Large interests were at hazard among the moneyed few, including the Queen and many of her Court, but the people were more disturbed by Philip of Spain's wish to restore the Catholic religion in England than allured by the prospect of gains

from piracy among Spanish galleons or trade with far-off unknown territories.

At this period what seemed a truly national spirit was being created among the population in the Low Countries or Netherlands, which are now known as Holland and Belgium.

Philip at the bidding of the Church was carrying fire and sword in the vain hope of stamping out the Protestant mode of worship. The savage and, as it seems now to us, lunatic conduct of his generals and viceroys clamped almost the whole population together in a fierce resistance. Philip was beaten by this rising in mass. The Dutch Republic was founded, later to become the Kingdom of Holland.

Apparently this was a triumph for national character ; so it might have been represented until this day but for the reconquest of Belgium by Spain, which put Belgians back in their old Catholic environment. Later they were combined with the Dutch in one kingdom, but there was soon an angry split which resulted in the breaking away of Belgium from Holland and the emergence of a new nation, now for the first time called Belgians.

Did there emerge then a new national character ? How otherwise are we to account for the differences between Holland and Belgium which are noticeable when we pass from one country to the other ? The easy way is to dismiss them offhand as the result of differences between two "national characters." The Dutch, we may say, are cleaner and tidier, they are more frugal, more house-proud, more business-like, and harder at a bargain—because they are Dutch ! The Belgians are better-looking, more genial as acquaintances, less grasping—because they are Belgians !

But wait a moment ! There are differences, not only between Belgians and Dutch, who formerly were one nation, and therefore ought to have shared one national character, but among the Belgians themselves. The Flemish-speaking element in Belgium prides itself on being distinct from the French-speaking. There is friction between them, due not at all to their speaking different

languages, but to what one side (the Flemish) calls diversity of interest, while the other sets it down to self-seeking agitators.

Where is the national character here, then? If the reply be made that in a hundred years it has not yet had time to form, I must retort that the "national character" which is supposed to have beaten Philip of Spain was active four centuries back and that the Belgians were credited with possessing it as firmly as the Dutch. If Belgians have not formed a character of their own, they ought to exhibit that of their neighbours and former fellow-citizens. Why don't they?

The answer is plain. It is that French-speaking Belgians, Flemings, and Dutch have been under different influences and have reacted accordingly. The gloomy and austere discipline of Calvinism which is accepted by the majority in Holland made men hard at bargains (it had the same effect on the Scots), while it also made the women industrious and dutiful in their homes. Rivalry led to the prevalence of these qualities among Catholics as well as Calvinists. Thus the characteristics known as those of the people of Holland were formed. They did not appear with the same frequency in Belgium—for the reason that the population there was very slightly Calvinized. The friction between the Flemish- and French-speaking sections may be accounted for by a feeling among the former that they are not on equal terms with the latter, who moreover do not conceal their claim to consider themselves the more civilized and cultivated. Thus the nation which was welcomed into the world by lovers of freedom in the sixteenth century produced no "national" character, but is split into three parts.

In that century there were also seen the beginnings of the South American nations. Spaniards interbred with Indians. The resulting strains were neither Spanish nor Indian. All can perceive that the Argentines, Chilians, Bolivians, Uruguayans are different from both. Plainly perceptible, too, is the difference of the Brazilians from Portuguese on

the one hand and Indians on the other. Changes as marked must have occurred when Saxons mixed with Britons, Danes with Brito-Saxons, and Normans with Brito-Saxon-Danes, but these date back so far that they have been forgotten.

In the United States the mixture is too varied for anything like a distinguishable type to be produced. We can see how English folk of the kind who went across the Atlantic to practise their bleak, intolerant religion were changed by the exhilarating climate and the generous soil. We see also how the settlers in the South—Cavaliers and churchmen—retained their aristocratic manners and country-squire habits, for the reason that they created an environment which very much resembled what they had left behind, and of which the effects were intensified by a languorous climate favourable to parasitic growths.

The retention of this environment and the inter-breeding of the old Southern families, which had little social commerce with outsiders, kept the Southerners distinct for a long time. As soon as they mixed more freely with Northerners and people fresh from Europe, they lost the characteristics which could not be called "national" because they belonged only to a part of the nation, but which were still considered to be English, though there had long ceased to be any likeness between the country-squire type in England and that which had developed in Virginia and the Carolinas. Not only did these characteristics disappear when family in-breeding became less common : they were shaken off by pure Southern families who moved into another environment, went north or west. Only then did many of them begin to consider themselves Americans. They were still for a time distinguishable from other Americans by their softer voices and slightly drawling speech ; these soon left them after their surroundings had been changed.

The seventeenth century found the idea of national character so little prevalent that no shock, scarcely any surprise even, was felt when the English nation split into two

factions and engaged in civil war. No appeal seems to have been made to love of country as a sentiment which should have prevented this. No one suggested (so far as I have read) that strife between brothers was hateful to God. It was apparently looked on as natural that the quarrel between King and Parliament should be settled by arms.

This can astonish only those who think that patriotism as we know it to-day flourished three hundred years ago. It had not at that time been born. Loyalty to the throne was altogether distinct from it ; so was the determination of the trading class and the smaller squires to get rid of an outworn monarchical system and to substitute the rights of property for those of privilege. Neither side took any account of the nation as a whole.

What really gives matter for astonishment is that in the popular imagination neither Roundheads nor Cavaliers represent even remotely what has come to be known as " the English character." That character has never been held to include either strong imagination or deep religious feeling, yet the devotion of one side to the King and of the other to Jehovah make the high lights of the story, as ten generations of the English have had it related to them.

The motives of the Puritan leaders are more in keeping with the idea that the English are concerned always with " the main chance " and resent any interference with their claim to " do as they please with their own " ; but these motives are studiously concealed, even repudiated, by serious historians as well as by popular writers who attempt to combine sympathy for a romantic royal figure with respect for the religious fanaticism of those who cut his head off.

That is a modern confusion. No one was betrayed into anything like it at the time. The seventeenth century was a period of tangled duties, uncertain allegiance, divided loyalty ; the conception of " country," which began to be familiar in the later half of the eighteenth, scarcely affected the struggle. The nobles took up arms in the hope



of keeping things as they were, preserving aristocratic government. The Puritan leaders wanted change in the interest of the trading class ; they were determined not to be taxed without their consent. Neither made any pretence of seeking what would benefit the mass of the population, though both were convinced that what would be good for themselves must be good for everybody. There was no talk of the country's interest. The idea of "the country," as it came to be conceived later, did not then exist.

It came to birth somewhere about the middle of the eighteenth century. It was a result of the growing size and importance of the wealthy middle class. Standing between aristocrats and masses, the members of that class may have felt they had something in common with both, or else, more probably, they saw they could most easily get their own way by representing that the whole nation would benefit thereby.

Chatham was the first statesman to voice the pride of this class, its commercial ambitions, its sentimental desire for "national greatness." He shared its feelings, his phrases lent them dignity and splendour. He gave to the idea of a British dominion over vast far-off territories and populations speaking strange tongues a glittering attraction which appealed to aristocrats and masses alike. While in France the monarch could still declare "*L'État, c'est moi*," the British State already rested on a wider and more stable foundation.

That France was not a person wearing a crown, but a *res publica*, a "public thing," a possession shared by all Frenchmen, a tradition, an oriflamme, was an idea dating only from the Revolutionary era. Nor did it exist in Russia until after the Revolution. In Spain, in Germany, it has not yet been accepted as a reality. In neither of these countries has the middle class ever held sway. In Spain, as in Tsarist Russia, there have been aristocrats and peasants, few others. Hence the Spanish civil wars with their appalling cruelties. The German middle class has never been political ; it made no attempt to curb the last Kaiser's despotic vagaries ; it failed to make the Republic work

efficiently, and so let in Hitlerism with its crudities and shams.

As soon as Chatham had stirred up a sense of nationality, the baser sort of politician began to add it to his technique of deception. It was found disastrously easy to work up frothy indignation and mechanical hatred by playing on "national" passions. The War of Jenkins's Ear was an example of this. Whether the sea-captain lost his ear in a scuffle with Spaniards or whether, as was also reported, it had been cut off long before in a fight with British revenue officers will never be known. Nor did those who shouted for "the vindication of national honour" care. Walpole kept his head, but, like Aberdeen a century later (1854), was forced into war by a public opinion deliberately created for political ends. Walpole's prediction that those who rang the bells for joy at the beginning would be wringing their hands before the end was grimly fulfilled.

Even more deplorable than the lives cut short and the material losses suffered was the erection of a fresh barrier between the Spanish and English Peoples. Large numbers of the latter believed that all Spaniards took delight in cruelty; in Spain the notion prevailed that every Englishman was bloodthirsty and dishonest. So, earlier in the seventeenth century, conflicts between Dutch and English in the Spice Islands had caused the Dutch to be represented in England, according to Macaulay, "as fiends in human shape, lying, robbing, ravishing, murdering, torturing." In Holland, no doubt, the English had the same character. The working-up of that anti-Dutch resentment by English politicians was due, however, in large part to the annoyance they felt at the employment of so many Dutchmen by William III; its origin was more domestic than international. Any weapon was snatched up that would serve against the King and his Bentincks and Ginkells, his Zulesteins and Auverquerque. The abuse flung at the Dutch had little "patriotic" character. It was less a stimulus to love of country than a move in the political game. We may compare it with the prejudice against the

Scots stirred up by the opponents of Lord Bute, favourite Minister of George III.

Far otherwise must we estimate the embittered feeling against the French which was first noticeable during those long eighteenth-century struggles for the possession of Canada and India. There had been nothing to match it during the wars with Louis XIV in the early part of his reign, those wars which were really part of the religious series and in which Marlborough won his fame. These were regarded as contests which did not much concern the nation. They were "the King's wars." The masses had little or no idea what was being fought for, nor were the aristocrats much wiser.

Chatham left on the imaginations of all who heard him, and of the far larger number who were told about the effect of his speeches, an image of national antagonism. He imparted to a great part of his nation the conviction that every Englishman was concerned in securing the far-off possessions which the French king also coveted. For the first time conquest of oversea territories became popular. For the first time a notion prevailed that somehow such conquest would benefit the whole population of Britain; that belonging to this population was a fine thing; and that anyone who stood in its way must be considered the enemy, not only of Britain, but of the entire human race.

No corresponding patriotism arose among the French until later, when Napoleon did for them what Chatham did for the English; he aroused in them exactly the same confidence that they were unconquerable, that their aims were to benefit humanity, that their foes were foes to progress. Napoleon was a disciple of Chatham; he saw what Chatham's oratory had done for England; he did as much—or more—for France.

Both were able, partly by the exercise of dominating personalities, more largely because of the stupidity of the masses, to persuade people that wars might bring benefit to whole nations. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century people had been told it was their duty to fight for God or

the King or both. Now they were told that their own interest lay in fighting. No longer did rulers assert "*L'État, c'est moi.*" They cried instead "*L'État, c'est vous.*" And nations believed it.

So we come to the era of national, distinguished from dynastic, wars. So began the cult of national glory. Linked with it came the illusion of national character. It was not enough that nationality should be based on common history, traditions, and carefully inculcated sentiments. It was not enough that a nation should have a common language. It seemed necessary to invent a blood-tie, a common ancestry, hereditary virtues. Thus the concrete of national feeling was reinforced by tin girders, masquerading as steel.

## VII

### HOW THE ENGLISH HAVE CHANGED

I can't believe that the character of one nation is much different from that of another, or does not have the same variations.—  
*W. H. Auden.*

To the era of national, distinguished from dynastic, wars may be traced the first attempts to endow nations with distinct individualities, to personify them by allegorical figures.

John Bull, for instance, was a creation of George III's time ; he had a good deal of the Farmer King in him. But neither then, nor in any period since then, has the bluff old gentleman in top-boots and country attire represented in any way more than a very small part of the English people. As Prof. Pollard put it in his *History of England*, "the conventional stolidity ascribed to John Bull has been the least obvious of English characteristics."

John Masfield goes farther than this ; he denies that the "national emblem" has any English traits in him at all.

"I have seen many images of John Bull, but none showing him as a person who would think, or pray, or fight, or be courteous or chivalrous or merciful, or practise any art or sing or make love, or do a decent day's work, or have an enlightened idea, or be tolerable company under any circumstances whatsoever."

The Poet Laureate finds John Bull, not merely not English, but not even human !

Was Uncle Sam ever typical of the American people ? Or Marianne of the French ? No ; they are as meaningless as John Bull. The Germans have never settled on a single national figure ; they could not decide between the German Michael and a fat blonde dame called Germania. Once

they were personified by an Austrian with a sweep of black hair and a tooth-brush moustache, as they were a generation before by a figure cloaked and silver-helmeted, with a fixed glare in his gaze and a large *Schnurrbart* moustache comically turned up at the ends.

As the Italian emblem for a moment stood Mussolini. So Napoleon stood during a short epoch for the French. But the volcanic Corsican was far from representing vast numbers of reasoning, peace-loving Frenchmen. Nor did his imitator on a small scale in Rome exhibit, for all his melodramatic theatricality, any qualities that could be called specially Italian.

Can we ever say truly that a man is typical of what is called "national character"? Nelson is often said to have embodied that of the English, raised to a high degree. Actually Nelson was not, either in merits or defects, in the least like what the English are supposed to be. He was inordinately vain, talked at times in a manner foolish and offensive, paraded a vulgar mistress, sided with one of the worst tyrannies in Europe against its unhappy subjects, disobeyed orders in the critical hour of a battle (though with fortunate result).

Nelson's reputation as a typical Englishman was due to his ability for naval warfare. "Britannia rules the waves"; Nelson cleared the enemy off them; therefore Nelson was a "representative Briton." Haig had also that title conferred on him, though he was the exact opposite of Nelson—respectable in private life, serious, modest, sensible; and vastly inferior as a commander-in-chief.

Milton and Shakespeare, again, were opposites in everything save the possession of poetical genius. Which was the more representative of an English "character"? We can ask the same question about Cromwell and Clarendon, Bunyan and Buckingham, Samuel Wilberforce and John Wilkes, Palmerston and Bright.

If we seek outstanding types of American character, are we to choose Washington or Benjamin Franklin, Lincoln or Grant, Nathaniel Hawthorne or Henry James, William

Jennings Bryan or Colonel House? These pairs had scarcely anything in common. Of almost all famous men, American or British, or of other nationality, it can be said that they were individually unlike any standard figure supposed to represent the nations to which they belonged.

Nor do we discover that the undistinguished are any truer to an imaginary type. There are in every nation infinite varieties of temperament and disposition, as there are of feature and stature, facial expression and bodily shape. If we are ever tempted to say "That man is a typical . . ." whatever it may be, we are pretty certain to discover sooner or later some trait which makes our conclusion absurd.

To this it may be objected that individuals who differ widely from one another act in a similar way when they form crowds. That is true, but it does not follow that a national character necessarily arises from the behaviour of the mass of a nation.

This might follow if that behaviour could be foreseen, if it were consistent, if it sprang from principle or accorded with some faith, some theory of the universe.

What we find, whether we read history or examine current happenings, is that national behaviour follows no set course, conforms with no set of beliefs or traditions, can be twisted in any direction (as I have shown already) by skilful manipulations of herd emotion.

Thus the English, in spite of their professed religious "character" and in spite of their boast that as "sportsmen" they are generous to beaten foes, have had laid to their charge acts so bitterly vindictive as to shock the conscience of the world. Such acts, it must be remembered, are not committed by nations, but by men who for the time being are in charge of national affairs. The English, however, tolerated the petty harshness of Napoleon's captivity. They wanted after the Crimean War a peace that would humiliate Russia (they did not get this; their statesmen were too wise). They approved the 1919 Peace Conference plan to crush the Germans under loads of undischageable

debt and intolerable humiliation. So the English reacted to the mean designs of short-sighted rulers. At other moments, under more enlightened ministers of State, they allowed acts of generous wisdom to be performed, such as the settlement with the French in Canada and the handing back of South Africa to the Dutch. They even welcomed Boer generals in London.

Contrasts like these mark the behaviour of all nations. The American People declared at one moment they would not forgo the advantage which seemed to be their right as builders of the Panama Canal—the right to escape tolls. Then they cheerfully agreed to pay tolls with the rest of the world. They acquiesced in the atrocious ruthlessness employed against Filipino rebels and in the granting to them later on of a free constitution. The French welcomed Napoleon back in 1815 and a few months afterwards were glad to see the Allies enter Paris after beating and taking him prisoner.

What follows from this ?

That real or imaginary persons may illustrate at moments national moods (which they themselves have probably induced) ; but that never have there been typical English or Americans, French or Germans ; nor could any symbolic figure be made to do more than exalt or satirize this or that quality in them, a certain virtue, a particular defect. Even then it would be almost certainly inexact to call such a defect or virtue national.

Consider, for example, that "sportsmanship" which all who extol the "English character" set in the forefront of its merits. Englishmen "play cricket." Ask Australians what they think of that. They will tell you angrily of English bowling which appeared to be aimed at the bodies of batsmen rather than their stumps, of innings closed by declaration in order to put the other side in on a bad wicket.

Ask the London *Spectator*, which complained that a county XI (Middlesex) deliberately refrained from making runs in order to deprive Cambridge University of a victory



and of the chance to ask for a new ball, giving advantage to bowlers, after a certain score had been reached.

Recall the anecdote related by Mr. James Agate about a French boxer who proffered a helping hand to an English opponent whom he had knocked on to the ropes and who was rewarded by "a vicious blow in the mouth." "*Si c'est comme ça !*" he said and resigned the fight.

Now, it will at once be objected : "You can't judge a nation by isolated incidents like that."

To which I reply : "Exactly. I do not propose to do so. Indeed, my whole object in writing this book is to prove that it would be absurd to do so. But it is equally absurd to judge the nation by isolated incidents of another character."

The English in the lump are to-day no more and no less "sportsmanlike" than other nations. They may once have been, because no other nation went in for sport ; the English had the field to themselves. They still like to repeat this legend. It is a legend none the less.

That a section of the English play games for their own sake, and not solely in order to win, is true. Such enthusiasts exist also in America, and elsewhere. But nowhere in numbers sufficient to make this a national characteristic. Indeed, whenever any trait is described as "national," so many exceptions have to be admitted that the description is proved inaccurate.

Froude spoke of the English preference for "poetry, courage, daring enterprise, resolution, and broad honest understanding" as constituting greatness. Then he went on to complain (*The Nemesis of Faith*) that the Tractarians, who secured a great deal of support for their Oxford Movement towards the middle of the nineteenth century, aimed at substituting for these qualities "devotion, endurance, humility, self-denial, sanctity, and faith."

Whether Froude was right or not in his statement of the virtues which the English looked for in great men is more than doubtful, seeing that those whom the mass of the nation have delighted to honour were such as Dr. Sacheverell, John Wilkes, George III, and Horatio

Bottomley. But, leaving this aside, he could not logically claim that esteem of these virtues was part of the character of the English, while he admitted at the same time that a large section of them esteemed others more highly.

If we say there is so much cruelty to children in England that a Society has to be kept up to prevent it, its existence is held to prove that the English are not cruel. If they are charged with ruining the beauty of their island, pat comes the reply: "But a large number of us do all we can to stop it." Should their fickleness in politics be enlarged on, their unchanging attitude in foreign affairs can be put on the other side of the account.

As lately as 1904 a careful observer of British manners could report that the aim of Englishmen who had made fortunes in commerce was to get out of trade and be "gentlemen." That was true at the time. It seemed to many to be part of the national character. Since then the aristocracy has itself taken to business. Young men of title work in banks, stockbrokers' and merchants' offices; no branch of trade or finance is despised by them. Cabinet Ministers turned out of office become Company Directors. Has the national character altered? No, circumstances have changed.

In the nineteenth century there was a quality known as "the English *morgue*," that haughtiness which disagreeably marked the behaviour of aristocrats and their imitators, but on which "old Fitz" (Edward FitzGerald, translator of Omar Khayyam) actually dwelt with pleasure when he thought of Frederick Tennyson (brother of the poet) abroad. This reputation went back as far as Froissart, who used the word "haughty" to describe the lack of affability in the English manner. No gentleman of Aquitaine or Gascony could get an appointment in his own country (when those regions were under English rule): the rulers said they were not on a level with them, nor fit to associate with them!

Of course those whom Froissart called English were Normans; yet in later times the same reproach persisted.

No doubt there was ground for it. A few of the English did behave haughtily (Mr. Dorrit tried hard to). But only a few. Not more than a very small part of the English were haughty. Among the aristocratic even, many behaved sensibly, gave no offence.

The English are credited with a national character so persistent that it has endured since the ages of the Crusades. Montalembert asserted that "no nation has changed less than the English. Modern England is all to be found in germ in the twelfth century." Another famous French author, Taine, said that of all peoples the English were "the most capable of transforming, without recasting, themselves."

Yet a hundred years ago, in Taine's time, in Montalembert's also, the English were accounted to be, in the phrase of Emerson, "of all men those who stood firmest in their shoes," while in the sixteenth century Pope Eugenius IV had stigmatized their "wavering and unsettled lightness," which was the reputation they then had, as other testimonies prove. Camden observed that these faults marked even the English clergy, who had to be disciplined for love of finery.

In the sixteenth century the English had the reputation of being heavy drinkers and roysterers; in the middle of the seventeenth visitors from abroad complained of their pious formality and aversion from pleasure; later they reported that the English Court was more licentious in its amusements than any other.

Each comment was true—of a certain section. The mass of the nation deserved none of them. It pursued its occupations without going to extremes in any direction—as does the mass of every nation. All these masses are very much alike. They have no special characters. These are to be discerned only in a small number, not always the same number; even if the same group is chosen for analysis, it is liable to change, to take up fresh fashions, to follow a new lead.

There come moments when nations are united by

common fervour, but these are quickly gone. Nor do they at such moments display the characteristics usually allotted to them. Under the influence of mass emotion I have seen the "stolid" English become wildly excitable, the "mercurial" French gloomy, the "business-like" Americans foolishly vindictive, the "kindly" Germans sadistically cruel. Not all of them, not the greater part even, but enough to make their mood appear "national."

Thus the outburst of "mafficking," on the relief of the besieged small South African town Mafeking, from which this slang term came, affected only a tiny fraction of the English people, while among Nazi stalwarts who enjoyed beating up Jews and killing "Marxists" were found only the lowest elements of the population of Germany. Yet many date from the former incident a change in the "English character," and it is commonly believed that under Hitlerism Germans in general trampled, like maniacs, on the idea of human worth.

Defoe knew his countrymen : he wrote :—

"A 'true Englishman's' a contradiction,  
In speech an irony, in fact a fiction."

Were the "true Englishmen" those who fought for Charles I or those who fought against him? Those who shouted "Wilkes and Liberty" or those who kept the choice of Middlesex electors so long out of Parliament? Those who favoured war with the Boer Republics and approved annexation, or those who detested the war and a few years later warmly supported giving back the conquered territories?

In "merry England" there were Puritans; pedants also, and prigs: we find plenty of them in the drama of that time. Under the gloomy sway of the Roundheads cheerfulness kept creeping in. Merriment has never departed from the English. Some of them have been always as fond of laughter and pleasuring as folks elsewhere. Some of them, too, have been susceptible at all times to religious revivalism (Wesley's, for example; the Tractarians', the Evangelicals'; Moody's and Sankey's), just as Florentines

were in the time of Savonarola ; or Frenchmen who rushed to join in St. Louis's crusade and the attack on the Albigenses ; or Spaniards who gloated over the fury of their Inquisition. Yet even Dr. Inge rebuts the assertion that England is the country of the Bible. He " regrets to say that we do not read our Bibles."

Of other supposed characteristics Dr. Inge disposes with equal ease :—

" We are told that ' England is the country of the *will* '—we really take life rather easily. ' The English are a nation of shopkeepers '—we are not close-fisted enough to be good shop-keepers.

" Our critics, moreover, do not agree. I cannot remember any quality that I have not heard attributed to my countrymen, except meekness and loquacity."

Even these labels the Dean might have found pinned on to certain types of Englishmen. If to be meek means, as I maintain, to be unassuming, which is the correct translation of the word used in the Greek Testament, then meekness belongs as a characteristic to the pleasantest of Englishmen—as it does to the pleasantest people everywhere. As for flow of language, capacity for and enjoyment of conversation, Macaulay and Gladstone are but two of the numberless excellent untiring talkers on record as British celebrities, while the obscure in England are far more likely to be chatterboxes than strong, stern, silent men.

The English pride themselves on their honesty. " An Englishman's word is as good as his bond." There is justification for this, though they are not notably more honest than others. But how, if we accept the theory of " national character " formed in past ages and transmitted from one generation to another, can we fit in with Charlemagne's rebuke to English merchants for selling wares of poor quality and short measure? That might, if it stood alone, be dismissed as the spite of a jealous foreigner. But the proceedings of English trade guilds contain proof that their members had often to be fined for the offences

named. How could people so little scrupulous hand on scrupulosity?

That many English poets have been gifted with imaginative genius is known to students of literature in all lands. Yet the English in the lump are credited with a character that is unimaginative, stolid, practical. They believe themselves to be men of determined purpose, who decide on a course and stick to it. Their changes of mind, however, are so frequent that on the continent of Europe "perfidious Albion" is a common reproach, and even statesmen who understand the injustice of it complain that they never can tell what the English will do next.

Are the English then to be set down as a nation of hypocrites? Or shall we say that some of them take one view and some another? The latter seems to me the more sensible course.

Self-righteousness was during the middle part of the nineteenth century a characteristic of those who claimed, and were generally admitted, to represent England—the commercial class, the religious, the leading statesmen, the land-owning squires. It was pumped into the nation by politicians, pressmen, pulpiteers. Even now traces of it linger on. Seventy-five years ago it was rampant. Russell Lowell satirized it with a fierceness unusual in his writing.

"It's you're the sinner allus, she's the saint ;

Wat's good's all English, all that isn't ain't ;

Wat profits her is allus right and just,

And, ef you don't read Scripture so, you must ! "

Yet the Englishman Matthew Arnold castigated his middle-class fellow-countrymen for this fault quite as scathingly as did the American Lowell. The masses never swallowed the doctrine of English supremacy in morals as in trade. Nor did the more intelligent members of the classes among which it was industriously preached.

That the preaching had success with the less intelligent cannot be denied. Large numbers of the English are admitted by the well-instructed among them to be convinced of their superiority to other nations. This is illustrated by

innumerable stories of which that of the small schoolboy's essay is typical. He wrote : " For yes the Germans say *ja*, the Italians *sì*, the French *oui*. The English alone get it right." Another legend is that of the undergraduate who was asked : " What would you like to be if you weren't English ? " and who replied at once : " English." But that small schoolboy and that undergraduate might be found in any nation vaunting its national superiority. Their attitude was not specially English. Such complacency is universal.

Thus, while certain characteristics which belong only to a section are called " national," others which belong to all the world are given the same title. Into the former mistake even so international a mind as that of Goethe could fall. He judged the English from the young travelling Englishmen whom he saw at Weimar. They were rich, most of them were aristocratic. They struck him as being convinced that " they were lords everywhere and the whole world belonged to them." From the particular, Goethe argued the general ; from the sectional, the national. The English, he said, were people who had the courage to be what nature had made them. " There is nothing vitiated, halfway, or crooked about them ; such as they are, they are complete men."

Had Goethe known only such a section of the English as we meet in *Evelina*, or the kind of people to whom Smollett might have introduced him ; had he lived among rural labourers unable to read or write, subservient to squire and parson, or among the city-dwellers who broke out of their filthy slums to engage in the Gordon Riots, would he have passed the same judgment ? Of course not.

Even when the idea of national character is in reflective mood admitted to be an illusion, it often reasserts itself under the stress of irritation or the pricking of humour.

Augustine Birrell wrote wisely in *Res Judicatae* :—

" What is a nation ? It is not blood, it is not birth, it is not breeding. A man may have been born at Surat and educated at Lausanne, one of his four great-grand-

fathers may have been a Dutchman, one of his four great-grandmothers a French refugee, and yet he himself may remain, from his cradle in Surat to his grave at Singapore, a true-born Englishman, with all the Englishman's fine contempt for mixed races and struggling nationalities."

Yet in another passage Birrell gave way to annoyance with the behaviour of some of the English and declared that "no foreigner needs to ask the nationality of the man who treads on his corns, smiles at his religion, and does not want to know anything about his aspirations." Applied to certain unpleasant Englishmen that is just. As a sketch of "national character," it is ridiculous.

The Englishman of the nineteenth century used to be described as independent to the verge of eccentricity, as resentful of authority, one who could be persuaded, but not ordered.

According to an American observer reckoned acute, the English are "a people who will obey orders and obey them because they want to obey them." They are "a nation completely unified. Everywhere else there is Right and Left with a chasm between them. Everywhere else there is a ferment of conviction that the world must be radically altered. In England the conviction seems all but universal that, while 'whatever is' may not be wholly right, a few minor changes will fix it."

That was written after Mr. H. V. O'Brien of the *Chicago Daily News* had watched and mingled with 1937 Coronation crowds in London. It took no account of there being at that moment a strike of omnibus men in that city and a risk of the quarrel between miners and colliery owners developing into a national stoppage. It disregarded the very large number of people who refused to obey the orders of the Press and become hysterical, who did not go into the streets and shout for the Coronation. As a judgment it was based on the behaviour of a small proportion of the whole English people; so was the nineteenth-century judgment which ascribed to them totally different qualities.



It is equally far from the truth to declare all the English perfidious and to credit them with exceptional good faith. They are of all sorts ; a nation cannot be ticketed.

Even more plainly does this appear when we examine the legend that the English nature is reserved, disinclined to display any emotion, cold and unruffled on the surface whatever fires may be burning beneath. Of the English as a whole this is grotesquely untrue.

When they feel joyful, large numbers of them dance and sing in the streets, ride by the dozen on the tops of taxicabs, stay up all night in the open so as to get good places for a procession. Alarm drove millions of them in 1900 and in 1931 to vote so distractedly for a " safe " government that in each period, for the duration of a Parliament, their political system, through the absence of an Opposition, was thrown out of gear. They mourn the death of a king with an intensity for which history provides no parallel, and then after a few days, appear to forget him entirely, so rapid their absorption in other excitements.

Even those of the English who at one time were taught in Public Schools to suppress their feelings are now encouraged at these schools to give vent to them by acting plays, and letting their imaginations have free scope in art or music.

There are to be found Englishmen, and Englishwomen too, who either conceal their emotions or have none to hide. Such exist, however, in all countries. They are not more numerous in England than elsewhere.

It may be said that in the past they were ; this contention, whether it be sound or not, disposes of national character. For if tastes, habits, beliefs, conduct, change from age to age, they lose the significance attached to them. And that they do so change is indisputable.

Not " nationally," for they are never spread through an entire nation. Each section varies them ; they alter, like everything else.

That habit of cultivating a frigid expression, for example, which never prevailed among any but the " upper class " of the English, has now been discarded by them. The idea

that a "gentleman" does not show his feelings is antiquated.

Take another illustration. Englishmen of that class are to-day careless in their dress ; spend little on it ; are not particular about colours or cut. That is a complete change even from thirty years ago, when a precise, expensive, sombre garb was essential for working hours and occasions of ceremony, while even their play-time clothes had an aspect formal and severe.

This had, in its turn, been a break-away from the elaboration of men's costume which marked the earlier and middle part of the nineteenth century. Indeed, it was a reversal of the custom which for a very long time had made men eager, like women, to adorn themselves as extravagantly as their means allowed.

"Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy," Polonius advised his son. Such advice would to Englishmen of to-day seem merely silly. Yet Pendennis followed it, and the young Dickens wore waistcoats almost as magnificent as Jos Sedley's "crimson satin embroidered with golden butterflies."

Go back a little further and we find Horace Walpole writing to a friend about a coat of claret colour which required lace trimming, and with serious interest discussing quality and price. We smile contemptuously at such discussion.

The wealthy Englishman of Queen Anne's time used whalebone to keep the skirts of his coat stiffly protuberant. He spent as long choosing cravats, fine shirts with ruffles, silk stockings and handkerchiefs, high-heeled and silver-buckled shoes, as any woman would devote to her shopping.

In spite of that, Mr. Duff Cooper, a writer of books as well as a Minister of State, has laid it down that "the Englishman" never liked to attract attention. "It has always been his object to be well dressed without being conspicuous."

Examine any section of the English people ; none will be

found to have the characteristics with which it was credited a hundred years ago—or even half a hundred. Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, said that the idea of the State, which in Germany was “a thing divine,” meant in England the freedom of the individual citizen. The English wanted to be free themselves, and they wanted the people of other nations to be free also.

Glib assertions by statesmen that the nations they represent are determined on this, or indignant at that, are frequently insincere and almost always nonsensical, though by repetition and exaggeration they may sometimes work up anger or harden obstinacy.

Among the English of the mid-nineteenth century, however (the period of Prince Albert's observation), there certainly were many who felt that freedom from the rulership of irresponsible sovereigns was desirable, not for them only, but for all men. Palmerston was little of a democrat in our sense. When Gladstone said he was in favour of enlarging the right of self-government so that it should include all men, Palmerston “told him off” severely. Yet, as British Foreign Minister, Palmerston supported every effort to throw off despotism and, defying Queen Victoria, made Britain the world's leading democratic country.

“Now,” said Mr. Lloyd George in 1934, “nobody believes in freedom.” Thus the Prince Consort's “freedom of the individual citizen” was far from being the ideal of an English nation largely made up of people taught by daily Press to attach more importance to the results of boxing, football, cricket, or lawn-tennis matches than to any matter concerning the economic, political, or social systems under which they live.

As the political character of the English changed, so did the religious character. By all accounts, their own and other peoples', they were during the nineteenth century more addicted to the outward shows of faith in God than any other nation. That certainly could not be said of them in the twentieth century when complaint is frequently

made that they are as the heathen who have never heard of Christianity.

Yet, while they neglect the outward forms of Christianity, to which their nineteenth-century ancestors paid respect, the English are in their conduct noticeably more Christian than those ancestors were. The brutality once considered to be "natural" to certain sections of the "lower orders" (coal-miners, for example) has disappeared. The harsh treatment of children in the "upper class" is equally an evil of the past. Large numbers are more tolerant, more kindly towards animals, more widely sympathetic. If it could be said that there is any "English character" to-day, it would be a totally different character from that with which the English used to be credited less than a hundred years ago.

## FALLACIES ABOUT SCOTS AND IRISH

SELDOM does any quality distinguish any large number of people in a nation. Yet it is not without truth that the Scottish nation is credited with a character which makes its members hard-working, thrifty, self-reliant. A large number of them have for some long time past displayed these qualities, and along with them allied defects—such as hard-fistedness, dourness, conceit. This “character” is, however, a modern growth; even now it not is shared by more than a part of the people in Scotland—those in the Lowland area. It was produced by economic changes which occurred during the later half of the eighteenth century.

Until the early part of that century Scotland had no trade to speak of, while its agriculture was feeble in method and consequently poor in yield. Why was this? Solely because there prevailed a fatalistic belief in a God who plagued mankind.

“In the mind of the farming tenants success or failure depended on the whim of a grim inscrutable Providence. Whatever happened, be it small-pox or hailstorm, was ‘bound to be,’ and the wise man resigned himself to make the best of it. On the undrained, unfertilized, sodden, or stormy ‘rigs’ the peasant drew no pride from his farming, so he had to draw it from heaven.” \*

As late as the eighteenth century Scots believed that weeds were a consequence of Adam’s Fall. God sent them to punish the descendants of Adam for his wickedness. To pull up docks, nettles, and wild mustard was to defy God!

\* Willa Muir : *Mrs. Grundy in Scotland*.

They would not use fans for winnowing grain, because the Bible said "the wind bloweth where it listeth." The fans caused "the devil's wind" and took power out of the hands of the Almighty, so they beat the grains with flails and winnowed away the chaff by throwing it into the air.

Such were the Scots when a gloomy irrational religion cramped their minds. No character more opposed to that which has for a century and a half been associated with their name could be imagined. They were far behind the English in enterprise, in industry, in initiative. Probably they were the most backward nation in Europe.

Only when the Scottish intellect began to deliver itself from the tyranny of the Scottish Kirk (which Buckle in his *History of Civilization* called "a by-word and reproach among educated men," for which "there exists no parallel save the Spanish Inquisition") did the characteristics soon to be termed Scottish appear.

They appeared for reasons now clear to us, though unperceived at the time. Chief of them was the Union with England. This not only allowed Scottish linen to be sent into England and across the Atlantic to America and the West Indies; it diminished the influence of the aristocracy in Scotland and helped to abolish the hereditary right of peers to administer justice. When the Scottish legislature was merged in that of Great Britain, the Scottish peers lost their importance; they never regained it. Indeed, they themselves lowered it still more when they foolishly took part in the Stuart rebellions, were exiled, and had to leave the country, returning after many years to find that they had been forgotten. They got back their estates, but could not regain their power over the popular imagination.

This contributed to the activity of the Scottish mind as much as the expansion of the linen trade stimulated manufacturing industry and commercial enterprise. The clergy lamented "the sin of too great fondness for trade" which was "put in the room of religion." Pamphlets and books on religious topics gave place largely, though by no

means entirely, to matters of wordly interest. Roads recently made by the English broke down the isolation which hindered the civilizing process. Activity succeeded to sluggishness. Apathetic resignation to the "will of God" vanished.

Methods of farming were vastly improved. The ancient division of the "common field" into strips owned by different cultivators, the unsound rotation of crops which had persisted for at least ten centuries, were abolished. Land was now let on reasonably long leases (usually the life of the tenant and nineteen years). Groups of very small holdings were turned into farms of fair size, and the farmers could count, as they could not so long as land was held "at pleasure" (the pleasure of the landlord, it need hardly be said), upon fixity of tenure at moderate rents.

This gave the country-folk an inducement to take up as much land as they could pay for : they had to pinch and scrape to raise the money. It made them work hard, the soil being in most parts not very fertile. It caused the system of tillage to be changed ; better implements were bought, a more advantageous rotation adopted, the soil given the time it required.

Before long agriculture prospered in all branches. Lowland Scottish farmers became known as the most skilful and industrious in Europe. Every great estate in England soon had a Scottish gardener. At the same time Lowland Scottish manufacturers were increasing their production in the same ratio. Competition was keen among them. Every youngster making a start in industry or trade saw that only hard workers with active brains could hope to win a fortune. Thus a large part of a nation was trained in habits of frugality, foresight, assiduous labour, strict attention to the matter in hand.

If the same causes had operated in the northern part of Scotland, the Highland population would no doubt have developed in the same way. But their land system was not reformed, they were too far from a market for manufactures to thrive among them. Further, they had not exercised

their intellects by denying the divine-right claim of the Stuarts, or throwing off the domination of hereditary chieftains. Numbing superstition still held them in thrall.

Thus the two halves of the Scottish nation came to exhibit characters so different that the Highlander was ridiculed for his poverty and pride, while the Lowlander, though not always credited with self-respect or scrupulousness about methods of getting rich, was admitted to possess all the qualities making for material success.

Let me admit that, if this had been true of all Lowlanders, or even of nearly all, it might be evidence of implanted character. But actually we find among Scots about as many with mediocre abilities, drunken habits, or wastrel proclivities as we find elsewhere.

One writer on Scotland, a Scot himself, contended that the key-note to the Highland character is a theatrical temperament, a passion for posturing, addiction to drama.\* He did not explain why in Canada numbers of Highlanders have made fortunes and won high positions by the exercise of a hard, practical business sense. Is it the climate of Scotland's west coast that is to blame?

He could not even make up his mind whether Highlanders were magnificently devoted to the drunken and lecherous Charles Edward or "always ready to desert him in order to stow away a couple of stolen cows or the loot from a battlefield." This latter was his view on one page; on another he celebrated "the loyalty of men who would not betray Prince Charlie for £30,000 and squeezed a second rent out of the ruined farms to support the exiled patriarchs."

Can those views be reconciled? Impossible! But the mystery dissolves when we recognize that some of the Highlanders were loyal, others larcenous. They had individual characters, but no national pattern to which they all conformed.

Even so great a mind as Voltaire's could fail to appreciate the error of judging a nation by a few of its members. He

\* A. G. Macdonell: *My Scotland*.



credited the Scottish race with giving "rules of taste in all the arts" to the rest of Europe, because he had met one or two cultured Scots or read their books. To mistake them for the nation was ridiculous. Voltaire could not have done so had he travelled in the country. The monotonous ugliness of the villages, the poverty of architecture in the towns, the absence of gaiety in decoration and furnishing, would have corrected his error. These features persist, unhappily, though the passion of the owners of small middle-class houses for bright colour in their gardens does something to mitigate them, while the War Memorial on Edinburgh's Castle Hill proves that, when opportunity offers, both taste and ability can rise to it.

Some fifty years ago what was called Scottish literature (in England "Scotch") began the conquest of a large reading public, as the Waverley novels had done nearly a hundred years earlier. But Walter Scott represented his countrymen as being well up to the intellectual standards of the early nineteenth century. Towards the end of it Scottish novelists, known as the Kailyard (Cabbage-patch) School, represented their countrymen as weak in the head.

Cunninghame Graham declared angrily that it pleased these novelists to draw half the population of their native land as imbecile. "Not a henwife, shepherd, ploughman, or anyone who thinks in 'guid braid Scots,'" he declared, "would recognize themselves, dressed in the motley which it has been the pride of Kailyard writers to bestow."

Other Scots, like Robertson Nicoll, praised the Kailyarders for their truth of characterization.

When Scots themselves disagree so hotly as to the "Scottish character," who shall decide? Shall we not conclude that both may be right? There are some of the one kind and some of the other. If all were "imbecile," the opposite valuation of the Scottish character could never have been arrived at. If all were hard-headed, gleg at the uptak', enterprising, the Kailyard School could not have flourished. Novelists must build on some foundation of truth or they are denounced as fakers.

What we are forced to decide is that the qualities so often attributed to the nation—industry, thrift, perseverance, quickness to see and take advantage of opportunities—are discoverable in those who rise to commanding positions, but not, unfortunately, in anything like the whole of the inhabitants of Lowland Scotland.

Further, it is noticeable in England and the United States that the descendants of settlers from Scotland seldom display either the enterprise or energy with which their forbears made good. Their economic circumstances are easier, the spur of ambition seldom pricks the well-to-do.

National character, if it were a reality, would persist, independent of surroundings and nurture. All the sons of successful Scots would rise a step, their sons would take still higher places, the whole world would be ruled and managed by Scotsmen. This should indeed, if national character were more than an illusion, have happened long ago.

Many observers would cite the Irish as an example of a nation which has definite national characteristics. But it is unlikely that any two of these observers would agree upon a statement of what those characteristics were.

Some would postulate a wide difference between the Irish of the Free State and those of the North. Yet they are very much alike. Why is this? Because they are descended from the same original ancestors? By no means. The ancestry of the whole of the Irish is mixed to an unusual degree.

In the South they call themselves pure Celts, but the Celtic invaders of the first century were people who already had crossed with other races, and, after they settled in Ireland, there were frequent waves of immigration by English, Welsh, Danes, Saxons, Norsemen, Eskimos, Scots of Highland and Scots of Lowland type, French Huguenots who started the Ulster linen industry, and Spaniards who stayed on after the wreck of King Philip's Armada.

Among the population of the Six Counties, which have a Home Rule of their own, are almost as many strains as meet

in their southern fellow-countrymen. The Ulsterman sometimes prides himself on his Scots ancestry, but forgets, or has never known, that the settlers from Scotland who crossed to Antrim and Down were themselves descended from Irish stock. This had not, of course, remained "pure," and their inter-marrying with the people of the districts they occupied mixed their blood still more. Large numbers of the Scots settlers were Roman Catholics, so there was no hindrance to their finding mates among the Irish ; in time many Presbyterians did the same.

Both Northern and Southern Irish are therefore of varied descent. Their climates differ slightly. Their industrial opportunities have not been alike. The Ulstermen have been encouraged to manufacture, the rest have had every obstacle put in their way. Yet they have one strong idiosyncrasy in common. They have both been brought up in a tradition of hatred. Both are told that their religion is the only true one. Papists and Presbyterians are alike in their stupid intolerance. For the rest, there are among both as many varying individualities as can be found among other nations.

How trace any "national" likeness between Eamon de Valera and Bernard Shaw? between Parnell's cold exterior, covering inward passionate fire, and the genial superficiality of John Redmond, who had himself always well in hand? between the pacifist Arthur Griffiths and the gunman Michael Collins? How reconcile the notion of the Irishman which still prevails among the English with the grave, poetic, melancholy creature that he so often is?

This notion was set going in the eighteenth century, when the "wild Irishman" of novels and plays was not very far removed from the truth. Up to that time Ireland had been a wild country, with people to match. When any of them got across the Irish Sea, they were shy, awkward, unsure of themselves ; this showed in their behaviour. They affected a gaiety they did not feel, a boisterousness which covered up timidity and which they saw the English found amusing. So there came into being the "stage

Irishman," swaggering, pugnacious, blarneying, an absurd, ill-natured caricature. In Ireland this was resented even by the English garrison. The prologue to a play called *The Irish Chief* produced in Dublin about 1773 announced as a novelty that the audience would hear

" So many lines without an Irish howl,  
Without 'by Jasus' or 'upon my showl.' "

In England such lines would have been condemned as unreal!

Later the stage Irishman was represented as good-hearted, though half-witted. This was after Charles Lever's novels had familiarized a kind of Irishman to be found oftenest among car-drivers, boatmen, and hotel servants, and made him appear to be the type of a whole nation.

Certain Irishmen lent themselves to the deception practised on their neighbours in England. They played up to the idea the English had of them. It pleased them to be thought "so amusing, so original." They found it profitable also.

"Man alive," says Doyle to Broadbent in *John Bull's Other Island*, "don't you know that all this top-o'-the-morning and broth-of-a-boy and more-power-to-your-elbow business is got up in England to fool you? No Irishman ever talks like that in Ireland, or ever did. But when a thoroughly worthless Irishman comes to England, and finds the whole place full of romantic duffers who let him loaf and drink and sponge and brag as long as he flatters their sense of moral superiority by playing the fool and degrading himself and his country, he soon learns the antics that take you in."

Then there was the feeling in Ireland that the English, the conquerors of the country, were people who must be humoured. If they were annoyed, they could do you harm! So even the simple peasant who was asked how far it was to this place or that would reply, not according to fact (if he knew it), but in terms of what he fancied the

questioner wanted the distance to be. The anecdote of the villager who answered the question "What time is it?" with "What time would you like it to be?" was not altogether imaginary. The rural Irish looked on the dominant English as people to be placated, never to be crossed.

Had the English known how grotesquely wrong was the popular idea of the Irish as a childish, irresponsible race, unfit to be trusted with their own affairs, the long-drawn-out tragedy of misunderstanding could have been avoided. The author of a book on the stage Irishman was right in his assertion that "more harm is caused by setting down this or that quality, this or that person, as typically French, typically English, typically Irish, than by any other fallacy."

Bernard Shaw exploded the notion that nine out of every ten of the English had about the Irish, but he set another in its place. As a piece of destructive criticism, *John Bull's Other Island* is as effective as the writing is brilliant and the creation of character amusing. But, while it shows what one Irishman is, it would be just as much a mistake to regard Larry Doyle as "typical" as it was for Broadbent to build up a myth of the Irish temperament and be surprised when his friend did not fit in with it.

That the Irish as a nation are shaped, or rather deformed, by mixing politics with religion is true. That in the west and south the soft climate, wet and cloudy so often, depresses energy and tends to dreaminess is true also. Their history created for them a tradition of hopelessness, so shameful was the oppression of their English rulers. Both the Roman Catholic and the Presbyterian religions gave priests and presbyters dangerous power, which tended to deprive their dupes of independence and make them morally feeble. But these are local misfortunes. The Irish, removed from their distressful country, drop the marks of them—unless they carry with them agents for perpetuating their disabilities and remain together in groups unaffected by their new surroundings. And even in Ireland there are many to be met with who resist these baleful influences.

## ALL SORTS OF AMERICANS

IN the United States of America we find sufficient refutation of the claim that a great nation must possess a specific character, due to the inheritance of certain physical, moral, and intellectual qualities.

During the past century the world has seen going on there, intensified and speeded-up, the process by which all nations have been formed. The formation of the American nation has been more rapid and more concentrated than any other example known to us. It has also been deliberate. In less than a hundred years a population of twenty millions has been increased to a hundred and twenty millions. No such exhibition of the building-up of a nation within so short a period had been given before. It has reduced to an absurdity the contention that nationalism, based on descent from common ancestors and the possession of hereditary traits, has anything either mystically or practically valuable about it.

The American nation, formed within this short period by men and women of the most varied stocks, has in many directions outstripped the rest, and in none been handicapped. The very diversity of its elements has given it vigour. The opportunities offered to people from countries where oppression checked developments have intensified their energy and initiative. On all the material sides of life the United States have led the way towards greater comfort and convenience. In other fields, though these have been less assiduously cultivated, they have added largely to the common fund of knowledge and all forms of art.

Can it be said truly that there is an American national character? A great many people both inside and outside

the United States would say "Yes." When they came to give their definitions of it there would be the widest disagreement among them.

In England there is still a notion that "Americans care for nothing but dollars"; that riches are pursued with a brutal ferocity which the law does nothing to discourage. This strange opinion is advanced in spite of the measures in restraint of unscrupulous finance and trading adopted by each of the three Presidents who have amounted to anything during the first half of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt; in spite also of the enormous sums given for public purposes by rich men.

The latest of the rulers named would, if the English notion had truth in it, have proclaimed himself entirely un-American by his assertion that "the difficult and dangerous situation in which the United States got itself [in 1932-33] was due to the general attitude: Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost." He meant the general attitude among business men. His rebuke to them was administered in the name of the People as a whole.

Until lately a deep respect for the Constitution and all the organs of government seemed to be inherent in the American character. It was considered sacrilege to hint that they might be improved. I myself once lost the position of book critic to an Anglo-American review because I was rash enough to review a treatise on the Constitution with what was regarded as levity. Yet about the same time Mr. Hoover, afterwards President, was telling a Special Committee on Reconstruction and Production in Washington that "we have the most antiquated organization and administration in government that we have in any kind of activity in the United States"—a clumsy wording, but one which allows no doubt as to its meaning.

Senator Calder, with sixteen years' experience in the capital, said he agreed with Mr. Hoover, but it was not until President Franklin Roosevelt went to the White House that the obstacles placed by the Constitution in the way of

necessary progress were held up to popular obloquy. The People decided against them. The man who declared the the Supreme Court to be antiquated and retrograde was put in power for the second time by the largest majority ever recorded.

With the same emphasis—that emphasis which is more and more seen to colour the behaviour of nations given to reading newspapers and little else—the Americans appear to have repudiated the claim, commonly made even in recent years, that they are still influenced by the “fundamental and original Puritanism, upon which all that is distinctive in American life and culture has been built.” Their variety stage, their tabloid Press, go to extremes in the presentation of “sex-stuff.” Among a large section of the well-to-do morals of the easiest kind prevail. Divorce is obtainable for the asking and has become more of a joke than it was in France at the time of Sardou’s *Divorçons*.

Yet it would be the greatest mistake to suppose that Americans in general are (1) lax morally or (2) callously disregarding of others in their business methods; while it would be equally far from the truth to deny that some Americans devote their entire energy to the amassing of money, careless of the methods they employ.

As a nation, Americans are neither inordinately greedy for gain nor idealistically unconcerned with it; neither vicious nor virtuous; neither lawless nor strictly law-regardful. There are all sorts in the nation, as there are in all nations; no generalization fits Americans as a whole.

Nearly everyone outside the United States believes that the “American daily newspapers represent the American mind,” which they suppose to be incapable of anything but crude sensationalism. They do not know that newspapers in the United States vary a great deal, that many are little given to exciting their readers’ lower emotions. It is often suggested that American journalism does not know how to be serious, informative in an unsensational way.

Yet when English imitations of the American weekly *Time* were issued, they were not, like their original,



designed to instruct and enlighten. Their contents bills proclaimed every week a sensation, often connected with the royal family. The Americans, it appeared, were interested in serious news, the English in mere frivolity or scandal.

Even where descendants from the same stock are concerned, the widest differences are found among them. It was to be expected that Southern "gentlefolk," whose forbears were Cavaliers, should be in some ways unlike the people of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, posterity to narrow sectaries and foes of joy. That the Yankee of cities and settlements should breed a tribe unlike that of the adventurer who dared the desert and lived solitary was natural enough. But here and there in the United States are to be found groups unlike any other Americans. They are unlike because they have not been open to the same influences, social and educational, which have been acting upon most of the nation.

Over the American continent there is noticeable a similarity of mind and imagination that can to-day be found nowhere else on so huge a scale and has certainly never been approached before. Yet this similarity, as soon as it is carefully examined, is found to be superficial.

Journey from the Atlantic in Maine, Connecticut, Massachusetts, or New York to the Pacific in California or Oregon, make your way from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico, you will hear the same wise-cracks, the same political catchphrases, the same banalities passing for opinion, which have been picked up from newspapers or radio, or carried round by travelling men. Yet beneath this surface uniformity there are endless grades of unlikeness.

What has the self-conscious culture of Boston in common with the pathetic eagerness for "uplift" that sticks out of the Middle West? Where could the fundamentalists of Tennessee, the Bible-worshippers who call the teaching of evolution a crime, find any point of contact with Yale professors or Washington civil servants? Save for their

use of whatever slang phrases happen to be popular, how can we discover any tie of "national character" between Babbitt and Martin Armstrong, Henry James's *Roderick Hudson* and Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, Carol Kennicott and most of the other Gopher Prairie women? What characteristics of the late Pierpoint Morgan are to be traced in a West Point military instructor, a New Orleans water-front labourer, a columnist of the Chicago Press?

What had the Presidents of the first half of the twentieth century in common? McKinley was weak in decision, flabby in action. Theodore Roosevelt was the opposite—vigorous, resolute, quick to decide, but not highly intelligent. Taft was wittily and accurately described as "a person of excellent intentions surrounded by a number of other persons who know exactly what they want." Wilson's intelligence was both alert and profound. He towered in intellect above most other rulers and statesmen, but he neglected the political art. Harding was a politician and nothing else. Coolidge's mind, narrow and ill-equipped, could not rise to the level of his opportunity. Hoover, an able administrator, was bewildered by difficulties. Franklin Roosevelt stood up to them with courage and enjoyment. Where was "the American character" in these widely differing personalities?

I have been often in the United States. I have known hundreds of Americans. Except for their accents—many of them had none to speak of—they were as unlike one another as if they had belonged to separate nations. In American professional soldiers I have found the qualities that mark such men the world over. American doctors are drawn by novelists as being like doctors elsewhere, and in many autobiographies they have so drawn themselves. Lawyers in the United States have the same habit of mind as lawyers in other lands. Writers come from a larger human field than in Europe, but they rapidly assimilate with the European type.

It is true that Americans generally are more energetic than the inhabitants of countries with less bracing climates,

but this does not constitute character, for the Americans who go to live in Britain or Italy lose their exceptional energy. The Astors in America were violent wealth-seekers. Their descendants in England are neither enterprising nor vigorous ; there is nothing to distinguish them from the wealthy English among whom they live.

There has in the past been much laudation of American independence of thought, disdain for titles and royalty. Yet no people can be more easily swung into this or that attitude of mind (Prohibition, League of Nations, Neutrality), nor are they any less snobbish than the English or the Germans in doing reverence to the highly-placed. On the other hand, take the supposed American habit of exaggeration, which Dickens parodied in *Nicholas Nickleby*. No doubt he had met exaggerators in the United States ; the failing existed, and was natural enough in a country that had developed so fast. But in no sense was it a national fault. An insignificant number made themselves ridiculous by it. The mass of Americans were and are free from it.

Yet the mass of Americans might easily be persuaded (as Italians have been) to exaggerate the "greatness" of their country with an even more absurd silliness than that of Colonel Hannibal Chollop and Mr. Jefferson Brick, as Dickens drew them. If the Press and the Radio plotted a drive in that direction it could be done. Like all other nations, they are in the lump powerless to resist any fad of opinion, any gust of sentiment or passion, which may be thrust persistently upon them.

When Maxim Gorki, at the bidding of newspaper owners seeking a sensation, was turned out of a New York hotel and refused admittance by others, the attitude of the public towards this offence against good manners, hospitality, and candour could be represented as "outraged morality." Large numbers of sponge-minded men and women were, indeed, induced to feel that, because the Russian writer and his life-long companion had never been officially married, they ought to be treated as outcasts.

Yet these same people raised no protest against the

marriage tie being in some American States regarded so lightly as to be legally snapped upon the flimsiest of pretexts; nor did they appear to be either shocked or aggrieved by the promiscuity among certain sections of young men and women which followed the 1914-18 War and Prohibition. The Press in general denounced neither of these aberrations.

When Ambassador Spring-Rice described the American People in February, 1916 (in a despatch to the British Foreign Office), as "wanting to keep out of war" and resolved "to avoid it at all hazards," he read correctly the prevailing sentiment. He was no less accurate when he stated six months later that they were "radically and inalterably opposed to intervention in extra-American affairs" and would not "accept liability which entailed action abroad."

Yet soon after that the American People went madder than any other nation had done over declaring war and kept up a frenzy of warlike excitement which carried them far along the path to mass-craziness. Was their "character" pacific at one moment, bellicose at another? Or were they simply pushed, now this way, now that, by politicians and the Press? They certainly were hustled by President Franklin Roosevelt into supplying Britain with enormous quantities of war material during the earlier part of the 1939-45 War, though it is unlikely that they would have taken up arms had they not been attacked by Japan. A deadly hatred of tyranny was supposed to be in their character, but they showed no inclination to defend freedom when it was threatened with eclipse.

Americans are credited with being more ready than other nations to welcome novelties. How does this square with the arrest of the first man who put up an umbrella in the streets of Philadelphia; with the resistance offered by them to the use of iron ploughs, as an insult to God who "meant" mankind to use wooden ones and also as a danger, since iron "poisoned the soil" and made weeds grow; or with the punishment by fine less than fifty years ago of a house-owner in a Middle West city for putting down a "new-

fashioned concrete walk " in front of his dwelling, instead of the usual brick pavement ?

American schools are rightly admired for their construction, equipment, and staffing. If there were an American character it ought to include the qualities that are bred by sound education. But it was commonly said until the world depression hit the country that the United States was the finest, most secure of all countries. " First among the nations of the world, the only one that is settled in every way, the best government on earth," was the usual tone taken by national speakers. Local ones were just as foolish in their efforts to create State or city patriotism.

" You must think there is no finer town in the United States than this. There is no finer school than yours, no finer parents than yours, no finer opportunities anywhere than you have right here. . . . There's no lovelier place on God's footstool than this old State of ours."

That was a Middle West clubwoman's boast to an audience of children ; it was typical of its kind. Only a total lack of anything that could be called education can account for such foolish boasting. It gave place after the economic blizzard to a mood of gloomy humiliation, in which it seemed that everything was for the worst in the worst of all possible countries. If self-glorification had been an integral part of " American character " it could not have changed almost overnight to self-reproach and depreciation.

## MANY KINDS OF FRENCHMEN

ABOUT French "national character" there is, I fancy, more muddled thinking than about any other.

It is supposed to imbue them with a devoted self-sacrificing love of *la patrie*. Yet nowhere are Governments more detested and abused than in France. Not only that : there are a great many of the French who hate the Republic itself. Yet it remains true that, in general, they are warmly attached to the soil on which they grew up—if it was the soil of a village or small town.

Vernon Bartlett, who is well qualified to speak, since he has lived among them, says in his *Autobiography* :—

"When a Frenchman talks of *mon pays* [my country] he may mean France, but the chances are that he means the very small section of it where his ancestors lie buried, his village, the copse where he did his wooing, the river where he goes fishing, the café where he plays cards or billiards when the day's work is over. For that he would fight. For the English equivalent of that I would fight ; but this local patriotism, this love of simple existence in unpretentious places, encourages a respect for the other man's *pays*. It is only when people begin to be proud of areas painted red, yellow, green, or whatever it may be, on a map that they become aggressive and acquisitive."

*Pays* has actually a local significance always, but Bartlett's remark and reflection are both sound and valuable.

Again the French are supposed to be prone to excitability, impulsive action, gusts of emotion, sudden violent agitations. Diderot tells a story (it is in his *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*) which ought to settle the matter. He relates meeting a

fellow-author who had just produced a play and offering congratulations on its success with tears in his eyes, his voice choked by affectionate pride. The dramatist replied coldly : " How well you express yourself, M. Diderot."

Two Frenchmen were there, as entirely different as the Duke of Wellington and that other Englishman who exclaimed, giving him an arm across the street : " I shall never forget the day I was able to be of service to the hero of Waterloo," to which the Duke's answer was : " Don't be a damned fool, sir."

Was Diderot, or was the other, the true exponent of French national character ? Those who know France well will answer, I think : " Neither." Each represented a certain type.

A French author, M. Roland Alix, protests against generalizations as to " French character."

" By way of classifying us in their catalogues, like botanical specimens, professional psychologists stick labels on us. ' The French love justice.' Or again, ' The French have no sense of infinity.' Or again, ' The French are traditionalists and do not understand evolution.' We are credited with a rigid character. But, on the other hand, we are reproached with our frivolity, our addiction to gossip. Are we supposed to be chameleons or what ?" \*

Such generalizations are all the more absurd because they change so frequently. Let us see how the French have been regarded by the English during the past five hundred years.

The slighting opinion of Frenchmen which is reflected in some of Shakespeare's plays was the result of the wars caused by the English kings' claim to titles and lands in France. In order to induce their subjects to do battle for that claim, those kings and their councillors spread the notion that the French were a contemptible race.

Shakespeare held no such view himself. He showed up

\* *My France*, published by Jarrolds 1939.

the hollowness of the story of French aggression in the opening of *Henry V*; and in *King John* he made them appear to better advantage than the English, though, to satisfy the popular liking for ridicule of them, he put into the mouth of the Bastard the usual gibes.

This English disparagement of the French character died away in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—in spite of the renewal of war by William III and its continuance under Anne. The Restoration drama contains few French men or women, and they are not made more foolish or contemptible than the rest. Wycherley in *The Gentleman Dancing Master* drew a stupid fellow affecting French ways and talking with a French accent after a stay in France, but he coupled this caricature with that of an Englishman equally absurd who displayed like affectations after a residence in Spain. There was no attempt to work up feeling against the French, as there had been in earlier times.

How can we account for this? By remembering that the war against Louis XIV was not considered an English war. It did not arise out of any English quarrel or English territorial expansion. It was a war which interested Dutch William immensely, but the nation very little. As soon as it was over Englishmen who could afford to travel began to spend a good deal of time in Paris; by the middle of the eighteenth century young men of fashion "were as much Parisians as Londoners." \* The French were then respected and admired—for a variety of reasons which could not apply to more than a very small number of them. Fashionable persons bought their clothes in Paris, their furniture, their coaches, their knick-knacks, their pictures, even their books. Hume and Gibbon paid equally warm tribute to the intelligence of the French (proof of it was the attention paid to these writers, who got little at home). French taste, French wit, French *savoir vivre*, were extolled and envied.

\* Sir G. O. Trevelyan: *The Early History of Charles James Fox*.



The French Revolution changed little the sentiments of English aristocrats and men of letters towards their counterparts across the Channel. Exiles were hospitably welcomed, their losses sympathetically deplored. All of the French who favoured change from the old régime were abused and detested as thieves, murderers, enemies of God and man. The mass of the nation were pitied and despised as weak victims of bloodthirsty oppressors. Thus English opinion divided the French into three sections, each with a character of its own.

Then came Napoleon. The English could not be sure whether the French shared his passion for glory or whether they were still poor creatures compelled to obey a tyrant by providing cannon-fodder for his campaigns. What few of them perceived was that, while the army of conquest offered shining opportunities to youth and talent, and while Napoleon's genius inspired devotion in his soldiers, the bulk of the French nation wanted, like the bulk of people at all times everywhere, quiet lives, security, and as much well-being as they could procure by their labour.

After Napoleon had "changed the character" of the French nation (which did not prevent them, as I have mentioned, from growing very tired of the "glory" which he won at their cost, and turning from him as soon as it faded) they submitted to the rule of stupid and decadent Legitimist Bourbons until shrewd, *bourgeois* Louis Philippe of the Orleans branch "wangled" himself on to the throne. He promised everything, performed nothing; was tolerated for eighteen years, then sent flying. The second Republic was set up.

After three years of that the French went wild for Louis Napoleon, who promptly clamped on their necks the collar of absolutism.

For Paris despotism may have been, in the phrase of the time, tempered by epigram. The mass of the nation had no such solace. Yet they shouted for their foolish Emperor's wars until he gambled and lost: then they wanted a Republic again.

Some of them preferred Communism, without having any clear idea what it meant ; they fought fiercely to settle which it should be. Republicans won—and made a monarchist field-marshal their President ! Nevertheless they kept their Republic—for seventy years. Now they have another.

But when we inquire if they are in any sense truly represented by their form of government, we fail to find marked differences between them and other Peoples. Their manners are more courteous than those of the English, but that is not due to their republican form of government. It goes back to a period much earlier. A French author named Lesuire wrote a book about the English in the eighteenth century, calling them “ The Savages of Europe ” because they had not the polite manners of the French. Froissart had marked the English four centuries before as “ the most obstinate and presumptuous people in the world.” In each case no more than a small part of the nation was characterized, but from the time of the Norman invaders, who considered the native gentlemen boors because they dried their hands, after washing them, on a towel, instead of waving them in the air, French manners have been rated higher than English. To call them “ different ” would be more correct.

Certainly the French, like the Spanish, are taught from childhood to be courteous. Certainly most of the English have in the past neglected such teaching. But neither French politeness nor the supposed English disregard of it spring from character. The one may be compatible with intolerant, inconsiderate behaviour ; the other with genuine kindness of heart.

To say, however, that all French people are outwardly urbane and inwardly selfish would be as ridiculous as to label all the English “ rough rind and sweet kernel.” Both types are found in both nations. All types are found in all nations.

A friend with whom I discussed this—he has lived in France for a long time—gave me as illustrations of a

distinctive French national character these incidents which had come within his own experience.

He had been to the races at Longchamps and took a tram back to Paris. After they had gone a little way the tram stopped. A good many others were stopped ahead of it. He got out to investigate and found that numbers of workmen who were accustomed to get back into the city by tram at that time were indignant at the cars being occupied by the racegoers.

"They are our trams," they said. "Why should we be kept out of them by loafers who have been amusing themselves? *Ils ne passeront pas!*" And they held the trams up, standing in a mass on the tracks. Nor did they move until special cars had been sent out from Paris to take them in.

That my friend offered as an instance of republican sentiment, insistence on equality, and so forth. So it was—among Parisian workers; but then I remembered that fast trains do not carry third-class passengers in France and that I had seen even Parisians submitting meekly to an order by the police that not more than two or three people should speak together on the principal boulevards.

The other illustration was this. My friend, who is a painter, wanted a large number of frames for an exhibition. He gave the order at a shop where he was well known. Before they booked it, they asked how payment would be made. It was at a period of currency disturbance. He suggested francs. No, they might drop in value. Sterling? No, they could not trust a currency that had gone off gold. How, then? They shrugged their shoulders. Nothing doing. He went to an English frame-maker, who said, "You give me your cheque. That'll be all right."

That was to show the extreme cautiousness of the French in money matters. But I knew of instances almost identical among English business folk, and I reminded my friend, too, that nowhere have financial swindlers been able to catch more mugs—or to catch them more easily—than in France.

Many British and American soldiers who served during

the two wars in northern France spoke of the French as grasping, mercenary, greedy to take an unfair advantage in bargaining. These soldiers were often made to pay too dearly for what they bought from small farmers or at small town shops.

Meanness of that kind is a trait frequently to be found among the peasant-proprietors of Normandy, Picardy, Artois, and French Flanders. It is a result of their hard struggle to win a livelihood from the soil. They are forced to look at every sou, not twice, but three times before they spend it. Their character is a consequence of their environment. No one who knows France as a whole would suggest that the French in general share it.

How or when arose the reputation of the French, in England at any rate, for loose morals, flippancy, irreligion, is hard to fix. It was firmly established before the war of 1870. Carlyle's hopes for victory by the Germans, strong, stern, silent, virtuous, home-loving, were based on the delusion that the French were light-minded chatterers, who had no word for "home" in their language. "Lubricity" was a quality commonly assigned to them: the dictionary gives the meaning of the word as "slipperiness, smoothness . . . lewdness, wantonness."

Because French fiction, both novels and plays, treated sex more frankly (though they did not approach the frankness with which English fiction now treats it), and because Victorian make-believe morality sent men who wanted a change from it to Paris, which therefore laid itself out to attract them, it was assumed that France was inhabited by a nation lacking in modesty, self-restraint, and all sense of the value of family life.

How ludicrously mistaken that judgment was everyone acquainted with the country and the people in it well knew; nevertheless it persisted. "Gay Paree" remained for most of the English a mythical city of debauchery, despite its being the most serious, hard-working of all the great capitals.

Deeply rooted in British minds was the fantastic notion

that Frenchwomen were engaged always in practising their attractions upon men and could be counted on to encourage illicit advances. Equally common was the belief that Frenchmen were dashing, fiery-tempered, high-spirited, unsuited by temperament for trade or industry.

Actually most Frenchmen are, as a result of upbringing and education, inclined to be timid, cautious, reserved. Walking across the rails at a French wayside station, I was warned by the *chef de gare* that I might be run over. A station-master of any other nationality would have told me "that is not allowed," but would not have mentioned the exceedingly remote possibility of danger. The same apprehensive frame of mind accounts for French motorists using their horns so frequently, far more than they are used elsewhere.

A great many Frenchmen and Frenchwomen are industrious almost to a fault. In no other country that I know (save in the Tehuantepec district of Mexico) do women take so large a part in the direction of business. This accounts for the meticulous methods by which halfpennies are saved and gained. Where but in a French hotel would you find a device installed by which the running-out of bath water caused a loud ticking noise to be heard, so as to prevent baths being taken without payment?

That is an extreme case, but it illustrates the carefulness inculcated in the French. They are taught to value thrift as the highest virtue. They practise in business the qualities which the English claim, but seldom exhibit. Yet they were given no credit for this by Victorians. They forfeited all claim to respect by keeping mistresses!

That was a curious attitude to be taken up by the English, who had until the Victorian age no need to go to Paris for indulgence in "vice" and raised no objection to their public men, including kings and royal dukes, living openly with unofficial wives. The change proves how quickly and easily "national character" can pass from one extreme to the other.

Nearest neighbours always incur censorious judgments.

The French would have been condemned for something or other, if it had not happened that notable "occasions for stumbling" were provided by them. The absurd legend that they were ungodly, libidinous, and of an incurable frivolity endured until well into the twentieth century.

Another legend about them is that they are vindictive, revengeful. That their hope of wiping out the shame and bitterness felt after the German victory in 1871 and the loss of Alsace-Lorraine made them behave often between that date and 1914 in a way that helped to make fresh war likely; that they were in favour of loading Germany, stricken to its knees, with burdens that would prevent its rising and becoming powerful again; that they did by their harshness towards the beaten enemy (sending black troops into the Rhineland was one example of it) prevent the substitution of a peace atmosphere for the acrid poisonous airs of war—these things are true. But to account for them by saying that the French national character is revengeful is ridiculous.

They were nor revengeful after their defeat at Waterloo. They have never at any time shown any wish to wipe out the stain of Wellington's victory over Napoleon. Even after the affair at Fashoda in 1898, when a French expedition to the sources of the Nile was compelled to haul down its flag and retire, leaving Britain in possession, neither the French people nor their Government showed any disposition to bear malice. The explanation is that they are not afraid of Britain; of Germany they are. Three times in a hundred years Germans have fought on French territory. Never can the French nation feel secure while a nation so much larger than itself is on its frontier with avowed imperialist aims. It is not "national character," it is circumstances that make France distrust and dislike Germany; it is fear.

The French again are generally said to be sceptics, yet numbers of them are so grossly superstitious that they believe in supernatural voices as firmly as did Joan of Arc and in miraculous descents of deities from heaven (as at Lourdes) with all the fervour of the Middle Ages.

Such belief is found also among French Canadians. In the province of Quebec and in settlements scattered through other parts of Canada are these two millions of French-speaking people, who are proud of their descent, call themselves French, and are credited with a strongly marked character. This ought, according to the theory against which I am arguing, to be identical with the character credited to the French in France. Actually there is no resemblance between them.

The French system of education produces a type which is intelligent, rational, logical, unsentimental, Agnostic. That type is common among the Frenchmen who attract the notice of the world—writers, scientists, politicians ; men by whom the rest of the nation is judged. The French in Canada have none of those qualities. They are pious, thick-headed, illogical ; they are swayed far more by sentiment than by reason. Simplicity is the trait common to them nearly all ; even their crookedness is naïve. They are in every way the reverse of the great majority of the people in France, though they are descended from common ancestors.

Nothing in this need surprise us, if we look at it in the clear light of reason, not in the dim obscurity of prejudice. The French in France have been played upon by influences entirely different from those predominant among the French in Canada. Schooling free from priestly domination, newspapers subject to no Church control, a public opinion impatient of authority, have made the French in France what they are. The French in Canada would be like them if they had been exposed to ideas, encouraged to think and doubt, shown history from the point of view of many revolutions, taught to distrust all power that is not derived directly from the People. And the French in France would resemble closely those in Canada if they had been always under the influence of priests, had always believed that disobedience to the Church would doom them to hell-fire.

This is proved by the likeness between the inhabitants of

certain districts in France and the inhabitants of Quebec.

Many Breton villagers are simple, pious, irrational. Often in the centre, and towards the south of France (though seldom in the south itself), one feels that the country-folk might be French Canadians. Many Breton villages and other parts of France have been kept, as Quebec is, outside the currents of nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought. The result on either side of the Atlantic is identical.

Character, whether of individuals or of groups, is formed by environment, education ; not by common ancestry, but by the strength or weakness of intellectual forces, the acceptance or refusal of creeds and traditions, the power of ideals and beliefs.



## HOW GERMANS WERE DECEIVED

No people insist more defiantly, even fiercely, upon the fixity and clarity of their national character than Germans of a certain kind. They are a small number only. In general, Germans, of no matter what station or degree of culture, are neither more nor less intelligent on this point than people elsewhere. They seldom give it a thought. But the small number who never cease thinking about it are noisy. They were delighted when Kaiser Wilhelm II declared : " The Germans are the salt of the earth." They repeat this very often. They have thus given the rest of the world the impression that all Germans are stupid, bumptious, self-centred, intolerant—an impression which is nowhere near the truth.

It is untrue even of Prussians, who were not by origin Germans at all, but a Wendish tribe. Having won the leadership of other elements in the population, they have contributed most to the common belief as to German qualities and characteristics. As usual, that common belief is wrong. It is based on the behaviour of aristocratic louts, brought up to despise not only other nations, but also their own, excepting the caste to which they themselves belonged.

Because Army officers in the time of Kaiser Wilhelm II pushed civilians off side-walks, entered restaurants with insolent swagger, and in society made themselves both laughable and odious, it was said that " Germans were boorish and unmannerly." Because Army sergeants were permitted to treat men on the parade-ground with a savagery unexampled even in Tsarist Russia, the world divided Germans into two categories, one of brutal ruffians, the other of cowering slaves.

The dictatorship of Hitler, employing as it did large numbers of such ruffians, and reducing the mass of the nation to conditions very much like those of slavery, kept up the belief in this division, even strengthened it. But it is still as erroneous as ever it was.

In Germany the proportion who prefer obeying orders to thinking for themselves is larger than in most other lands. Ferrero speaks of their "authoritative romanticism," by which he means that they like to be told what to do and are prone to romanticize those who give them orders, as they did the Kaiser and Hitler. This results entirely from their education and traditions. That they have no inborn reluctance to take a line of their own is proved by the bold initiative displayed by descendants of Germans who became naturalized in other countries.

In the United States Americans of German descent are to the fore in every trade, profession, and occupation, not through industry alone, but as the result of enterprise and individual effort. These qualities, repressed in Germany, though even there many rise superior to repression, show themselves as soon as the environment is changed, the education and traditions peculiar to Germany discarded.

The same explanation accounts for the fact that the proportion of Germans in Germany who delight in bullying and cruelty is also larger than elsewhere. These detestable vices were under kings and kaisers condoned by authorities who found them useful; in drill-sergeants they were encouraged. Under Nazism they were more openly and intensively cultivated. But no one who has known Germans in large numbers in and out of their country can suppose them to be inherent in the German make-up.

The mass of Germans are like masses everywhere—kindly, if they are not instigated to be cruel; fond of liberty, if they are not cowed into parting with it; neither subservient nor dominating, but ready to become either under incitement.

If the French or the English had been subjected to the influence of writers, mostly half-insane, who dwelt on their "world-mission" and the need for ruthlessness in tramp-

ling down all who opposed it, they would have thrown up as many harsh, intolerant patriots as Germany did. They might even have tolerated such stupidity as Dr. Goebbels affected when he made his statement that "the only instrument with which one can conduct foreign policy is, alone and exclusively, the sword."

Fortunately for the French and English, they were educated in a tradition which inculcated respect for the freedom of others and, while this did not deter them from acting, when it suited them, against it, they were obliged to pay lip-service to it. No writer of note read by large numbers glorified the lower aspects of British Imperialism until Kipling did so, and he only in a doubtful tone, with long intervals between his outbursts.

What was glorified in Germany during the short existence of the German Empire under the Hohenzollerns was the personality of the ruler.

"I desire to proclaim to the nations the gospel of your Majesty's sacred person and to preach that gospel alike to those who will listen to it and to those who will not."

That declaration by Prince Henry of Prussia, brother to Wilhelm II, was not an isolated outburst of lunacy; it was in harmony with the usual note of adulation which the Emperor enjoyed and which it was thought necessary to sound frequently in his ears. One result of this was to make shallow observers suppose it an indication of "the German character."

"The Kaiser has so grown into the life of the nation that when you touch it anywhere you touch him; and when you think of it from any angle or describe it from any point of view you find yourself including him. . . ."

"He has impregnated the nation with his own aims and ambitions to such an extent that they may be said to live their life in him."

So Price Collier, American author, widely popular, wrote in *Germany and the Germans*, published about 1910. Yet,

so little could the Kaiser influence the political life of the country that the largest party in the Reichstag was the Social Democratic, and so little did the nation identify itself with him that in 1918 he was told to go, and went instantly, "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung." Before long Adolf Hitler had become far more of a mob-hero than Wilhelm or his grandfather had ever been.

It would be tedious to cite passages from widely-read German authors in order to prove the cult of a national destiny, to be pursued without pity or shame. This is in any case unnecessary, for they are well known. One quotation will serve as an example : it is from Giesebrecht (*Geschichte des deutschen Kaiserzeits*):—

"Germans must dominate because they are a chosen people, a noble race, and therefore entitled to behave towards those who are below them in strength or intellect as all superior races have the right and duty to act towards individuals less well endowed."

Poisonous rubbish of that sort, if allowed to pass without instant and vigorous condemnation, affects feeble minds, unstable characters. For the disaster of Hitlerism the responsibility lies not merely on those who circulated the doctrine of Blood and Iron, but on the far more numerous Germans of intellectual and social standing who were too placid or too cowardly to denounce it as a foul and fatal snare.

Yet it would be unjust and absurd to pretend that all Germans were alike guilty. As always, the course of national action was set by a few. Vast numbers of Germans were deluded, other vast numbers terrified, into support of Hitler. "Aryanism" was as much a joke among intelligent Germans as everywhere outside the Reich. They saw through the nonsensical pretence that the Germans are like their reputed ancestors, of whom Tacitus wrote :—

"The Teutons prefer war to industry and consider it disgraceful to obtain by industry what they can acquire by violence. In peace they are sluggards, given over to sleep and gluttony."

Nothing could be more ludicrously unlike the numerous Germans who detest war, who are industrious and enterprising, who pursue their commercial ends with untiring energy.

Tacitus, one may be sure, generalized too freely. He himself in his life of Agricola paid tribute to Teutonic virtues. Yet his report was true of a great many: we know this from other testimony; we know also that the economic stresses of the age forced upon tribes living outside the area of Roman civilization a life such as Tacitus described. The economics of this age having become so entirely different, the people who live in it differ from those of the past, even the past that is not yet far off.

What are the reasons for the untiring industry of Germans in general, for the eagerness the middle-class have shown in their pursuit of education, for their success in trade and manufacture, especially through team-work rather than individual effort?

In the Middle Ages the inhabitants of what is now Germany could earn a comfortable living without difficulty by tilling the soil. Trade flourished in the Hanse cities. Industry made many rich beside the Fuggers, who added by banking and financial enterprise to the wealth they drew from silver-mines. Well-to-do Germans were easy going, pleasant people, fond of good eating and of drinking wine. All that was changed by the insensate Thirty Years' War, which left the country in a state of ruin unparalleled anywhere in modern times.

Half the population disappeared. Of the men who were left, a large part had never learned to work and had lived so long on plunder that they could not settle down to peace-time occupations. The peasants and even the big land-owners, who tried to restore agriculture, had to do without horses and, when they raised crops, were liable to the depredations of ex-soldiers who wandered through the land living on what they could beg or steal.

The chief industries, wool and linen, wine-making, brewing, paper-making, and book-printing, had been almost

killed. The numerous small State governments exacted all they could screw out of their subjects in taxation. What had been regarded as "national characteristics"—hard work, frugality, fair dealing—gave place to fraud, force, and cunning. Slowly the German people struggled back towards prosperity until the Napoleonic Wars flung them again into bitter poverty.

Out of the defeat of their armies arose, however, a new German spirit. After 1806 the genius of Stein planned a reconstruction which, although it left the people for a long time poor, gave them a system of education far ahead of anything in existence at that time. "The State must regain by intellectual power," said King Frederick Wilhelm, "what it has lost in material power, and to this end everything must be done to extend and perfect the education of the people." Stein also abolished serfdom, gave cities self-government, deprived the nobles of some privileges, created a military system which made every man liable for service. By these reforms such qualities as obedience, desire for knowledge, and self-respect were substituted for the disregard of discipline, schooling, and dignity which had up to then prevailed.

Enthusiasm for education among nineteenth-century Germans was not due entirely to intellectual motive. Any young man who could pass an examination, severe enough to be a thorough test of his ability, was allowed to serve one year in the army instead of two. Not only was this an advantage to him in starting his career. He was looked down on as a feeble-wit if he could not pass. His family felt he had disgraced them. This sometimes had the effect of making young men over-work and damage their health; but it raised the standard of painstaking diligence and mental achievement. For the habit of work once formed is seldom discarded.

Hence came the serious matter-of-fact cast of the German mind, the thoroughness of their work. In applied science they excelled. Their theorizing was tinged with fantasy, due to their university education including so

much philosophy and divorcing reality from speculation. In their practical use of knowledge (as in the improvement of dyes and lenses) they went ahead of all others.

Unfortunately the Germans who engaged in practical pursuits had no influence on social or political development. Up to the eighteen-eighties the only careers open to the gentry were in the Army, the higher Civil Service, the Church, medicine, and the law. In these careers they had almost a monopoly. They were therefore the ruling caste. They acquired the habit of authority. They considered that other classes must be kept in their places. Germans got no training in self-government.

From infancy they were taught that they must, in the words of one of Stein's reformer group, develop "those instincts on which rest the force and dignity of man—love of God, the king, the fatherland." And they were assured that they could nourish these best by doing as they were told, by letting others think for them, by cheerfully taking their places as parts of the great mechanism which was working out the nation's destiny.

Everyone had a position, a *Stand*, a calling; his duty was to make good in that, for, if he did not, he would get no other chance. Movement from one occupation to another, so common in America, and not unusual in Britain, was in Germany rare.

Thus few Germans grew up mentally, unless they went outside their own country. They remained adolescent. Elderly men, when they met for some celebration, would behave like students. Old ladies often showed that they had not, since they were girls, had a thought in their heads which was not put there by their husbands. Highly intelligent up to a point, not many Germans got beyond that point, which was fixed for them by their superiors, everyone but the Emperor having a superior and admitting his relative inferiority.

*Pflicht-gefühl* (sense of duty) was impressed on the minds of all Germans as the guiding principle of their lives, and this had many excellent results. But their duty was not to

be decided by themselves, it was to be imposed on them from above. Consequently those alone had independence of judgment who were able to resist what they were taught. Most accepted whatever authority wanted them to accept. That habit of mind became even stronger under the rule of Hitler than it was under the Emperors, the Hitlerite methods of enforcing it being more severe.

When the monarchy foundered and the Socialists found themselves unwillingly taking over the business of government, their fumbling soon convinced the nation that little was to be hoped from them. People could not recognize an authority which clearly did not know its own mind, and it was impossible that a nation which had looked always for instructions should decide suddenly for itself all the matters left in suspense by a revolution. Hitler's success was secured by reversion to the authoritarian régime. Once more the people had orders issued to them. They were to hear and obey, not to do any thinking for themselves. Their intellects, weakened by generations of discouragement, welcomed the change.

Even the academic mind in Germany failed to spread abroad that freedom in pursuit of truth which should be the fruit of education. Immensely industrious in research, scholars shrank from conclusions which might not be acceptable to rulers. They were robbed of their sense of reality also by the barren philosophic studies into which they were plunged, other lines of activity more actual and productive being closed to them. Thus dependence on "superiors" became, and remains, the strongest element in German life.

Hitler did not change the German character. What he did was to arouse feelings of self-respect and confidence in the future among many who had lost them, and to give free play to some of the lowest elements in the nation, to glorify acts and impulses which all decent people, whether in or out of Germany, condemn.

Long before Hitler began to attract attention, Rathenau, with his unusual insight, said that the nation had not in



political wisdom got beyond the instinct to find scapegoats.

“Such processes of thought as ‘the police are to blame, the Prussians are to blame, the Jews are to blame, the English are to blame, the priests are to blame, the capitalists are to blame’—all these we quite understand. But Germans have, properly speaking, no understanding of political tendencies. Our blatant patriotism bore the plainest signs of such a temper; half nationalism, half aggression against some bugbear or other; never a proud calm, an earnest self-dedication, a struggle for a political ideal.”

Rathenau wrote *Die Neue Gesellschaft* (*The New Society*) while the German spirit was still submerged in the flood of disaster, when there was none of the “blatant patriotism” that had helped to cause the 1914 War. The spirit was reborn in an even more violent and retrograde shape. It was as Rathenau described it—“half nationalism, half aggression against some bugbear or other.”

But this cannot be explained by “the German character.” If we try to fit it in with Rathenau’s prediction that “blatant patriotism” might lead to “a temporary reverse of humanity and culture”; or if we try to make it square with “the ultimate aims of living” which Dr. Dernburg, another prominent German, outlined soon after the 1914 War ended, we find that they have nothing whatever in common.

What Dernburg, at one time Germany’s Colonial Secretary, said was this :—

“However much we may smile at those who venture to-day to put the dictates of morality and humanity above eating and drinking, riches and prosperity : who can be happy only in an atmosphere in which not force but justice rules : who wish for an ordering of the world not in violent opposition to their religious professions : who interpret peace on earth as a peace of the conscience and the soul—yet these are, after all the ultimate aims for which we must all strive, and without which life would not be worth living.”

Now, if Dr. Dernburg and Walther Rathenau and men who shared their thoughts had put those thoughts before the German People as emphatically and persistently as Hitler trumpeted his, they would have drawn over to their way of thinking enough of the nation to make the world say, "This, then, is the German character."

For the "character" of any group, whether small or large, is imparted to it by leaders able to win assent for their proposals, their ideas. Under a democratic system forceful leadership is necessary, as it is for the success of dictatorial rule. The only difference is that the dictators, having secured power, keep it by violent suppression of opponents, whereas democratic leaders try, not to compel, but to persuade the mass of a nation to adopt their policies.

The frequent failures of democracy are due to the scarcity of men with ability to construct policies and with a personality sufficiently vigorous to impose itself on the mass. Politicians, skilful merely in speech, in the conduct of intrigue, in "eye-wash" and "wangling," are plentiful. Statesmen are rare—especially rare in countries which, like Germany, have been governed by dynasts and hereditary nobles, and where, in its upper ranks, the social order was so long based on "unscrupulous personal interests and exploitation, on shows and shams, on the demand for service and the claim to command" (Rathenau).

Of all the Germans prominent in politics since the Hohenzollern empire fell, Stresemann came nearest to statesmanship. He fell short, partly because he belonged more to the old system than the new and had not the compelling personality essential for the moulding of a national spirit; partly because the British and French Governments refused him the help he needed.

Had they given it, there would have been no chance for Hitler to pose as the restorer of German morale. It would have come to life again without him. The Germans would have reflected the character of men far above the Nazi leaders in intellect and intentions. They would have been considered still a nation in the forefront of civilization.

Instead of their being looked upon as the unhappy and dangerous possessors of qualities inimical to peace and good government, the strong ethical sense, which Prof. Werner Sombart claimed for them\* and which until a few years ago was generally recognized, would be accepted now, not less than it was earlier, as the foundation of their national character.

\* *Die Deutsche Volkswirtschaft im XIX Jahrhundert*, 1903.

“MY COUNTRY, 'TIS OF THEE . . .”

The English look down on Germans and consider them their inferiors.—*Admiral von Tirpitz to Col. House in May, 1914.*

Deutschland, Deutschland uber Alles,  
Uber Alles in der Welt.

—*German popular song.*

There is a degree of culture where national hatred vanishes, and where one stands to a certain extent above nations and feels the weal or woe of a neighbouring people as if it had happened to one's own.—*Goethe (to Eckermann).*

THE result of inventing national blood-ties has been disastrous. From the mistaken belief that there exist root-differences, due to different ancestry, between peoples of different nations spring :—

- (1) the ignorant conceit cherished by almost all of them that their country is superior to other countries ;
- (2) the dangerous delusions of patriotism ;
- (3) the chimera of national honour.

These, pressed into the service of economic rivalry, are the most potent causes of war.

Were these to be uprooted and flung on the rubbish-heap of discarded ideas, it would be impossible to make Peoples imagine that economic rivalries touch their interests.

No one does actually represent to Peoples at present that their interests are so affected. No one has done so in the past. They are told that the theory of wars being due to economic causes is Marxist and therefore untrustworthy. They are given other reasons for desiring to kill as many men, women, and children as possible of the nation or nations opposed to them. Such reasons as

that they are being, or are about to be, attacked, that their national honour is involved, that their patriotic

duty is to fight for "their country" whether they know what they are fighting about or not.

National honour I have called a chimera. It has been in the past taken so much for granted as a reality that even Cobden's shrewd intellect was induced to accept it at its face value. Hating war as inhuman, unjust, and wasteful, he held it to be legitimate "in defence of our honour." He did not explain what this meant.

"National honour" cannot be explained. It is a delusion equal to, and growing out of, the delusion of national character. If a nation is personified, if it is held to possess virtues and defects; then but a short step further is needed to endow it with honour, as if it were an individual.

If we admit national character, thus recognizing the existence of a certain mystical entity, the nation, we must also admit national honour. We must reverse Burke's familiar saying and declare that it is possible "to indict a nation," to insult it, to injure its interests, to impugn its honour.

But if we reject national character as an illusion, if we say that nations are masses of people who happen to have been born under the same Government, if we deny that any mystical bond unites them or that there can be national interests opposed to the interests of the individuals composing the nation, then we must refuse to believe there can be any such thing as national honour.

Some would go further, would say there is no such thing as personal honour; would argue that the term has for a long time, if not always, been used to hide real motives or cover cloudy thinking.

It was honour that compelled men unaccustomed to arms to fight duels with expert swordsmen and crack shots; honour that obliged a spendthrift to pay gambling debts, while he left his baker, butcher, milkman, tailor, doctor, unpaid. "My honour as a husband" used to be pleaded as a reason for refusing freedom to unhappy wives. Honour has been invoked times out of number for paltry or dishonest reasons, seldom for any reason that was sound.

What is called now "the honour of a nation" is almost

always the interest of those who decide what national policy shall be. General Gordon declared before he was killed at Khartoum that he had "done his best for the honour of his country." He confused honour with profit. He had done his best to add a vast territory to the British Empire. But extension of power confers no honour either on a nation or a man.

In the past monarchs have pretended that slights offered to them were offered to the Peoples over whom they ruled ; they have appealed to Peoples to take up arms for private monarchical interests on the pretext that "national honour" compelled them to do so. Thus James I of England persuaded the English that they were insulted because the King of Spain would not let his daughter marry an English prince, while Louis XIV, and later Napoleon, made the French people believe that by fighting interminable wars for their monarch's benefit they were defending "the honour of their country."

When dynastic interests gave place as governing forces to those of trade and finance, "national honour" as a motive for war gave place to "national interest." Now Peoples had to be induced to identify their advantage with that of the leaders in commerce, industry, and speculation. In the eighteenth century the Mercantilists, who believed that the more trade was shackled the more active it would become, declared that the Government ought to impose restrictions for the benefit of "the country." They meant that they wanted restrictions for their own benefit. Nor were they insincere. They were convinced that their benefit and the country's must necessarily be the same.

This conviction was firmly fixed in the minds also of their opponents, the Free Traders, who urged that the restrictions should be lifted. "The country" would thus be more prosperous, they asserted. But they had in mind the trading class, to which they belonged, or, if they were political economists, those members of the trading class by whom they were supported.

The political economists did not invent but they did put

into general currency the idea that "the country" was, not the whole mass of the population, but the commercial part of it, the part which was engaged in trade on a big scale.

This idea had been in the air of Britain ever since commerce began to oust agriculture from its place as the chief national industry. "The country" had once meant "the landed interest." But the pamphleteer of 1749 talked about "the whole Nation suffering in its Commerce" because trade was hindered by old laws. The "whole nation" had no connection with, no interest in commerce of any kind. But the phrase had an impressive sound.

Some hardihood would have been required to maintain that "the country" did include everyone in it at a time when the land-worker had become a kind of serf at the disposal of the parish overseer, and when press-gangs still forcibly kidnapped men to serve in the Fleet, so that many injured their health, as James Watt did, by staying indoors to be secure. The political economists, however, were able, thanks to the dense ignorance then prevailing, to spread the belief that, in the long run, the many would be better off because a few became rich. It must, they said, eventually improve conditions for all, if those few piled up large fortunes for themselves. Therefore it was the duty of those few to make their fortunes as large as possible. They were benefiting "the country."

Unfortunately for their argument along this line, the political economists put out at the same time a theory which completely destroyed it. They declared it impossible for the mass of people to be any better off than they were. They showed that subsistence wages were all that the workers could expect. There were "iron laws" which must prevent their ever being paid more than would keep them alive, with health and strength enough to do their work, and to produce children who would go on doing it after their parents had been scrapped.

It was also "proved" by the political economists that the hours of labour could not be shortened without ruining industry and thereby injuring "the country," which, now

clearly included those alone who drew large profits from industry and excluded the mass of the population who were either working for subsistence wages or not employed industrially. And this conception of "the country" persisted. The masses were stupid enough to accept it as the truth, without thinking about it.

In the wars of religion (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) the soldiers on both sides were largely mercenaries. Those who fought of their own accord or were forcibly conscripted had to be duped with the assurance that they were fighting God's battle.

Actually these wars sprang from economic and political rather than religious causes. Catholicism was bound up with despotic government and restrictions on trade. Protestantism represented the desire for democracy and trade freedom. But the democratic and *laissez-faire* ideals were then too novel to be used as incitements to fighting. It was necessary to drag in God.

To-day it would be as impossible to induce nations to make war in defence of a religion, or in the hope of extirpating it, as it would be to persuade them to engage in a dynastic war. But it is still essential to deceive peoples, as it was in the monarchical age and during the period of religious wars, if they are to be persuaded to fight. They can now be so persuaded only by skilful use of inducements which derive from the delusion of national character.



## WHAT "OUR COUNTRY" MEANS

A man's country is first the natural love and preference he has for the surroundings among which he was born, the people who speak the same language, with whom he has played and laughed and worked.

Second, there is an economic business concern competing with other concerns and trying to make larger profits than they. This is also called a man's country and, since nobody who did not carry his heart in his purse could love it, its promoters have done all they can to confuse it with the first country in men's minds.—

—*John Langdon-Davies.*

France is governed by an aristocracy of bankers and lawyers, who use "the country" for their own interests just as the priests used the monarchy in days gone by.—*Balzac.*

MOST powerful of the inducements to war is the invention of a mystic abstraction, "the country."

This has not merely been employed to stir the emotion of the crowd and make it amenable to the design of rulers; it has imposed even on men of distinguished intellect. Let me recall what C. H. Pearson wrote in *National Life and Character* :—

"Attachment to a great country is bound, other things being equal, to be more dignified and generous than attachment to a city, though the city may have been Athens or Rome."

That is, in effect, a plea for power politics. A country is called "great" because it is powerful, because it can back its demands with big armed forces. Did C. H. Pearson ever ask himself how generosity and true dignity (far removed from bluster and pompousness) can spring from pride in being able to browbeat and overawe? Evidently not.

The inhabitants of Athens were attached to their city-

state for quite other reasons. The famous speech of Pericles explains them. They were proud of the beauty of their buildings ; of their dramatists and sculptors, whose work every one of them saw and talked about ; of a constitution which gave them all a share in governing ; of orators to whom they listened with critical enjoyment.

Romans loved their city because it was orderly, well-proportioned, conveniently arranged. They respected its laws, they admired its senators, consuls, tribunes of the plebs. Its citizenship was both a privilege and of practical value.

To be attached to a large nation-state in the same way is impossible. No common daily life unites the citizens, they share no standards of taste, they take part in government only at a far remove. Few of them see their public men, few of them travel more than short distances from where they were born. Their country cannot be to them what a city was to its free citizens.

The very idea of " country " in the patriotic sense derives from our knowledge of the city-state, and from the illusion of national character. In a city-state the citizens, all educated in the same schools, all attending assemblies in the forum, all sitting at plays together, all going to war in a body, did acquire certain common characteristics. Athenians were alert for novelty, Spartans clung to old customs, Bœotians had homely wits. Ancient Romans were hard but reliable ; mediæval Florentines artistic but treacherous ; and so on.

As I have tried to show, no such agencies are at work to press members of nations in a uniform mould. They may repeat the same slogans, hang out the same flag ; but, in spite of national newspapers and the voices on the air which penetrate to millions of homes, the people of different classes, different districts, different occupations, have little in common except language, and that may vary so much as to make it difficult to understand each other's speech.

Only danger can for a short while draw them together, efface their divisions, give them a single purpose, though

even then exceptions must be admitted—for example, profiteers who enrich themselves at the expense of their fellows, as armament firms did in Britain during 1914-15 until they were pulled up. As soon as the danger is past the elements of nations fall apart again. Even while it is present individual qualities are more noticeable than any characteristics which could be called "national."

What is "our country"? It is supposed to include all who inhabit territory enclosed by national boundaries, but, in some way which has never been explained, it transcends them and becomes an entity in itself. "*Une nation est une âme, un principe spirituel*," wrote Renan in his vaguely sentimental manner, but he did not make his meaning plain. Nor has any commentator done so.

The personification of "country," of a nation apart from the individuals composing it, seems to be a re-hash of the old monarchical doctrine: "*L'État, c'est moi*." A monarch regarded the country over which he ruled as his property and the inhabitants of it as his subjects, bound to serve the interests of his country. The toast "My country, right or wrong" is a relic of the days when subjects had to agree with their monarch, whether they thought him wise or foolish, whether he was just in his dealings or a tyrant and deceiver.

It is strange that this acceptance of a tradition dating back to the time when kings had almost unlimited power should be stronger in a republic, the United States, than it is in any other democratic country. One of the leading American newspapers (*Chicago Tribune*) prints the motto daily as a slogan. One of their ablest presidents (Cleveland) told the students of Princeton University: "Support your country when she is right, and I am not sure you ought not to support her when she is wrong." A judge in the State of Louisiana refused in 1930 to admit a man to American citizenship because he would not agree with this view of an American's duty.

Personifying the country, calling it "she," giving it a personality, strengthens the emotional appeal. The idea

is conveyed that it must be as shameful to accuse your country of being in the wrong as it would be to denounce your mother in public.

Any open disagreement with your country is, therefore, liable to be called disgraceful, because it is unpatriotic. A patriot is one who loves his country—who will die for “her,” whether he understands what is the cause for which he gives his life or not. A patriot never hesitates to put the country’s interest before his own.

That is the theory, but it does not always work like that. Often it is hard to decide what the country’s interest is. To Cavaliers in the English Civil War it was unlimited monarchy ; to Roundheads, setting Parliament above the King. Americans fought with one another (1861–65), actually in a clash of economic systems, but ostensibly because they held different views as to what their country meant. To the Southerner it meant slave-holding and agriculture ; to the Yankee freedom of slaves and manufacturing. Two generations had to pass before Southerners could acknowledge that Northerners were their fellow-countrymen.

Not only have men of the same nation frequently fought among themselves ; they have brought in outsiders to strike at their country. Strafford would have liked to employ half-savage Irish troops to subdue his country for Charles I. Scottish Jacobites invited a French invasion of their country, so that the Stuarts might be kept on the throne. French *émigrés* at the time of the Revolution fought against their country in any army that would have them—English, Prussian, or Austrian. Russian *émigrés* in 1918 urged France, Britain, the United States, even Japan, to send troops against their country. Spanish rebels called in the aid of Germans and Italians to bomb their country’s cities and devastate the land. A Spanish author, D. Manuel Azaña, says this proves that Spain does not exist as a nation.

The explanation is simple, if we examine the problem without sentimentality or prejudice. To all those mentioned just now “the country” meant a form of government,

a social system. That is what it means to almost everybody.

Russians who were ready to take part in war for their country so long as the Tsarist Government maintained itself were equally ready to take part against the Government which followed that of the Tsar. Their country to them meant Tsarism. To other Russians Russia meant the economic system to which they were accustomed. A former Tsarist Finance Minister named Bark had no delusions about the Tsardom or its last representative, Nicholas II. But he left Russia when the revolution occurred and lived the rest of his life in London, where he was in business as a banker. He refused to call Russia his country because it had renounced Capitalism.

Those examples and many others might be attributed to personal interest. But in other cases ideology cannot be excluded. Spanish Catholics, for instance, like English Catholics 400 years ago, were unable to be loyal to a country that did not acknowledge ecclesiastical authority or promote the interests of their religion and its dignitaries. They may have had nothing to gain by such promotion, but Spain to them meant the Church of Rome.

It is possible to divest "our country" of all political, economic, religious ideas, but for most of us this is very difficult. Few would admit the feasibility of making the attempt. To nearly everybody "their country" is less a territorial than a political, economic, or religious idea.

When Cardinal Newman prayed for his country, he meant a Catholic England. No genuine Bolshevik would strike a blow for Russia if it returned to Capitalism. A Highlander asked a Royal Commission in 1884: "Why should we fight for our kingdom, when we see so much poverty and neglect by our sovereign and legislators?" Bismarck declared: "A State which deprived me of my property would no longer be my fatherland."

What everybody asks of "his country" is that it shall secure him a sufficient livelihood, protect his possessions, enforce the economic system he prefers, shelter the religion

he professes. If it does not satisfy him in these respects it is not "his country."

Thus to different people "their country" is represented by different ideas, and among these ideas neither the territorial nor the historical has ever held any leading place.

We can prove this by the readiness of so many people to transfer their allegiance from one State to another by taking out naturalization papers.

Royal families are supposed to represent nations in a peculiarly intimate, even mystic, way. But members of them frequently change their nationality by marrying princes or princesses of other countries. They have no hesitation about it. Nobody blames them, or even hints that they are "unpatriotic." That is a vivid illustration of the unreality of the idea that nationality is something sacred, precious, creative of character.

Very few change their religion, or go to live under a different form of government, or can contemplate Socialism, as easily as large numbers change their nationality. Most of them change it for a monetary reason, because their businesses will benefit; occasionally, being residents in a country other than that in which they were born, they feel a wish to be its citizens; in a few cases the motive is sentimental, a preference for this or that form of social relation, for a republican or a monarchical system.

Without any inward struggle they secure their advantage or give their preference rein. If a novelist were to represent a character torn by mental strife as to whether he should change his nationality, most novel-readers would say "What a fuss about nothing!" I can recall many novels which show men or women hesitating between two religions; in none that I have read do I remember any description of such a turmoil of spirit over the relinquishing of one citizenship for another.

Nor has any novelist, I believe, dealt with the change of character resulting from altered nationality. The theme might be very amusingly developed. A prim Englishman transformed into a blatant Yankee, a dour Scandinavian

becoming an enthusiastic Slav, a bombastic Italian turned into a taciturn Hollander. Why has so fertile a field for fiction not been cultivated? Simply because no one considers such changes likely, or even possible. No one really believes in national character. They only believe they believe.

Yet the influence of the illusion, and that of "country" which goes with it, are infinitely harmful. They set up artificial barriers to separate human beings whose interests can best be served by co-operation; they spread the belief that these interests are conflicting, whereas they are the same; they are used to create suspicion and fear. They are among the most pestilent secondary causes of war, and they conceal the primary causes in a haze of patriotic emotion.

When we say "we love our country," we mean what an Irish character is made to say in one of Howard Spring's novels—"My country is where I'm happy and where I'm let live in peace." Maybe its landscapes are dear to us, our earliest memories may cluster round them; our friends are there, we are accustomed to the ways of living which prevail there; in our country we are "at home."

But, dearly as we may love it in that sense, our love need not make us proclaim it the finest country in the world and our readiness to die for it. If we had to choose between dying in it and leaving it to live somewhere else, we should not hesitate. Many make the choice willingly when they are warned that they can stay in the land of their birth only at the risk of their lives; they pack up and go to a warmer or drier climate, to the high mountains, or to forests of pine.

Were our country to be attacked brutally, without provocation, we should take up arms to defend it, as we should defend our private homes against gunmen or thieves. But if in our homes we were instigated to take up arms against our next-door neighbours or the inhabitants of the other side of the street, on the ground that they were about to attack us, but in reality to serve the private purpose of the instigator, or mayhap because the instigator was foolish, what would our reply be?

It would be an immediate and resounding "No." We should see plainly that we were being asked to do something monstrous, something which could bring us no advantage, something both damaging and disgraceful. Why do Peoples not as quickly and clearly see through appeals to defend their country, instigations to make war on neighbouring peoples?

Simply because they do not take the trouble to understand what is called "foreign policy," though as a rule it is no more than a succession of makeshifts. Simply because they allow themselves to be doped by that word "country," and make no attempt to discover what it means.

We assume that the "country" is the joint possession of all the people in it. Actually the mass of these people own no part of it. If one of them were to start cultivating a small piece that was being used by nobody else, the law would sharply teach him his error.

We believe that "we" are somehow threatened by other nations, overlooking the truth that the interests of the masses are everywhere the same. We accept the statements of interested persons that other nations have designs upon us. As a preliminary to war, each party in the dispute is always told that it is defending itself, that the other party is the attacker. History blames both alike.

History also makes it plain that no people ever gained anything through war, whether dynastic or economic. "Nations"—that is, the rulers of nations—have gained influence and power. "Countries"—that is, the leading people—have become "greater."

England took rank as a leading country when its navy broke the might of Spain's Armada. Its statesmen gained in dignity, its merchants could do business more securely. The people were no better off.

Germany had a more important place in the world after defeating Austria (1859), Denmark (1864), and France (1871). But what this meant was more importance for German rulers; larger profits for German manufactures and commerce. The value of England's leading nine-



teenth-century position as a country was likewise shared among those at the top. In neither case did the mass of people benefit.

"The country" is sometimes invoked by a very small number of the highly-placed, who, though they are opposed by almost all the other elements of the population, get their way. In the first Franco-German War the French were called on to fight for *la patrie*; thousands died in the belief that they had done so. But Thiers, one of the foremost of French statesmen, told Lord Granville that neither the nation nor the Chamber of Deputies was in favour of war. It was the Empress, Thiers said, who pressed it on the Emperor, "and the generals promoted it on the hope of becoming marshals, and the marshals because they desired to be dukes and princes."

Goldsmith had an equally clear vision when he wrote the lines :—

"Though patriots flatter, still shall wisdom find  
An equal portion dealt to all mankind."

When a People is encouraged to believe that the "portions" are unequal, that it rises superior to other Peoples, that its country has virtues possessed by no other, it should distrust such oratory, which is in England and the United States more foolishly blatant than elsewhere. A committee of the American Bar Association drew up a creed for citizens. One article of it was: "I believe that we Americans have the best Government that has ever been created—the freest and most just for all." The same claim is put forward in Britain, and on such occasions as the crisis which forced Edward VIII off the throne the nation is assured both by newspapers and politicians that no other people would behave so sensibly and calmly.

To spread an exaggerated notion of the merits of "our country" is dangerous. It fomenta a foolish national pride. It circulates a foolish disparagement of "foreigners." It betrays a weak sense of realities. For it may be said boldly that all assumptions of racial or national superiority rest on no basis more solid than ignorance and conceit.

## NATIONAL CONCEIT AND IDEALS

What Professor Alison Phillips calls "the vital interests of a nation" I call the arbitrary fantasy of its rulers.—*Prof. Charles Seignobos.*

In direct contrast to Socialism, nationalism is a thoroughly aggressive impulse directed against the outer world ; its concern is not with conscience, but with power ; not with human achievement, but with war.—*Thomas Mann in "The Coming Victory of Democracy."*

ONLY ignorance can explain the prevalence of the idea that some nations are in a higher class than others. Only conceit can make certain nations exalt themselves by saying : "We are the finest race on earth."

Few go as far as General von Bernhardi, who considered war necessary in order to stamp a great part of humanity with "the impress of the German spirit," or as Prof. Wilhelm Hauer, theologian, who founded "the German religion" on

"the vitality of the German genius which has persisted without intermission until now and will persist so long as German blood flows in German veins."

To imagine any but German blood flowing in German veins is difficult. To suppose that German blood can be different from the blood of people not German is a grotesque biological error.

Even if Prof. Hauer's statement be not taken literally, if it be treated as meaning that to be born of German parents confers some merit or distinction denied to the rest of mankind, it is manifest nonsense.

Yet unfortunately there are as many British people who believe, with Cecil Rhodes, that their race is "the finest

which history has yet produced " as there are Germans who hold the same to be true about themselves.

Rhodes was young when he wrote that. Lord Grey (not of Falloden) lacked this excuse when he said in his *Memoir of Hubert Hervey* that, in so far as an Englishman differs in essentials from men of other nationalities, he " represents a more perfectly developed standard of general excellence," and regards the rest as being " on the whole not so excellent as himself." If this were not so, Lord Grey added, Englishmen would try to make themselves resemble men of other nationalities.

I quote that lamentably stupid remark because Lord Grey was looked on as a fine type of Englishman. Not only was it stupid to suggest that the English standard of excellence was higher than that of any other nation ; even more stupid was the notion that a man must either believe himself the superior of all other men or else try to be like some other !

Almost everyone would sooner be himself or herself than anybody else. This does not imply, however, that we rate ourselves superior to everybody else. Almost certainly we shall admit that there are others more excellent than we. Yet we do not direct our energies to copying them. We prefer to be ourselves, even though we may not " represent so perfectly developed a standard " as others do.

There was a great deal of heated talk during the two wars about fighting for the victory of this or that conception of the purpose of human existence, this or that method of aiming at a right development of individuals and of society. Even Walther Rathenau so far departed from his usual wisdom as to declare that

" the basis of the conflict is a difference in fundamental ideals of life and duty. That is the deep reason why the war must go on until it is proved which of these ideals is the true one."

Vast numbers of people, Britons as well as Germans, were deceived into thinking in this fashion. They did not stop to ask themselves how the possession of more engines and

munitions of warfare and of men sufficiently numerous and sufficiently skilled to use them, which were the deciding factors, could possibly affect "ideals of life and duty." The doctrine that the way to prove ideals to be true was to slaughter as many of your opponents as possible did not seem to them tragically absurd.

Nor, of course, did they go deeper into the matter and inquire whether the supposed difference in ideals was real. If they had, they would have been compelled to admit that it was not. The fate of Walther Rathenau proved this. He was murdered by Germans, by the very people for whose ideals he professed to be contending. In a short time his murder was approved in the name of the nation by rulers who taught that all Jews (he was a Jew) would be better out of the way. Was that one of the ideals for which he contended?

The whole pretence that in idealism can be found justification for war is nonsensical. It seems astonishing that men with active and trained intellects should put out a plea so futile. The explanation is that they are not immune from the poisons of patriotism and the worn-out mystical cult of "national character."

To Lord Grey, as to Walther Rathenau, war seemed disastrous folly. He forced himself to plead some excuse for it. He found the excuse in the rivalry of "independent nations" each with a "standard of excellence" which it vaunted as the highest. This rivalry, he declared, was "the moral justification for international strife and war." He took exactly the same line as Rathenau. It was the only line left for an apologist of war to take.

It was still being taken by a few shallow-minded persons even during the second of the world wars which brought western civilization to the verge of collapse. In a book which was published while this conflict was still raging (*St. George and the Dragon*), Lord Elton wrote fatuously of war as "the supreme agent of the evolutionary process" and "the one test mankind has yet contrived of a nation's fitness to survive." A doctrine which was rightly

denounced as poisonous and damnable when Bernhardt and other German writers put it forward, and which was cited as proof of the German character! Yet British writers adopted it and presumably therefore betrayed the same character. They could find no other plea which could seem to justify war.

Nations have always been taught by their Ruling Classes that it is a patriotic duty to fight for "the country." The mass of people everywhere have accepted that teaching. They have fought whenever a Ruling Class told them they must be loyal and patriotic.

Once kings and nobles appealed for personal loyalty. When that trick failed because of the perception that their interests and the People's were by no means identical, they changed the form of their incitement and urged, not only the necessity, but the beauty of risking life for "the country."

*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (Dying for one's country is a fine and fitting end). This concealed what were actually the same interests as before—those of the Ruling Class; but the mass of people did not know it. They fought and died, poor fools, deluded into the belief that they had something to gain, territory or prestige, or wiping a stain off national honour, or preserving democracy.

But, while the masses are thus easily deceived, a few people here and there feel the need of intellectual conviction. In order to satisfy and entrap them, a new theory of "patriotic" duty was invented. This represented war to be necessary as "a means of testing standards and ideals," and of securing progress by the aid of those which triumphed, and were therefore the more worthy of acceptance.

This theory was not produced for the masses. They would be bewildered by talk of conflicting ideals; they would laugh with wholesome common sense at the suggestion that they must uphold their "standard of general excellence" as superior to all others.

No, the "clash-of-ideals" excuse is intended for the few who use their intellects, and who form what is called public opinion. The many always take their beliefs from a few. To hinder the few from proclaiming the folly and needlessness of war, and of causing it to cease, this notion of conflicting ideals was conceived and gravely argued.

Successively the apologists of war have had to abandon  
the duty of fighting for God,  
the duty of fighting for divinely appointed kings,  
the advantage of fighting for territory,  
the advantage of fighting for trade.

Each of these defences has been, in turn, thrown down. Now the defenders try to screen themselves behind this flimsy invention of warring standards and divergent national ideals, an offshoot from the delusion of national character.

How has progress ever been hastened by war? By what war have finer ideals been imposed on the conquered? Why did the French fight from 1793 till 1798 for freedom from despotism, and then until 1815 for a despot? How could the Tsarist tyranny be said to have the same ideals at the outbreak of the 1914 War as French Republicanism or British constitutional monarchy? When did the American people discover that they and the Germans had differing standards of excellence? Only when the anti-German allies owed so much money in the U.S.A. that Big Business could not afford to see them beaten!

Both Lord Grey and Rathenau deceived themselves. No rulers ever went to war for ideals. Nor are different ideals to be found among nations, though at times, under the influence of mass-hysteria, they may repeat certain slogans, bellow catchwords they do not understand.

All peoples living under conditions that are in the main the same (economic, climatic, dietetic, agricultural, and so on) have in the main the same standards and ideals. These are simple enough. I have stated them more than once. I will state them again. To live in moderate comfort, to

earn a steady income, to feel secure against calamity or change. To be loved by wife and children, respected by neighbours. To deal honestly and helpfully with friends and acquaintances, and not too hardly with others.

These are the usual springs of conduct among people of all nations. They do not talk of ideals, do not even think about them—unless they are presented in vague, attractive guise with an intoxicating flow of words. They can be made to believe in war-time that they are a finer breed than the enemy ; that they aim at making the world better, while the enemy aims at making it worse. But, when war is over, the peoples pick up again the threads of daily life. Ideals and standards remain on each side what they were before.

There was far more divergence of ideal among the well-to-do middle-class and the mass of the population in Britain, in America, in Germany, than there could be among the warring nations. In all of these countries the well-to-do middle-classes held the same views ; the masses had their views also ; and the views of the first were far from being identical with those of the others.

In each State the well-to-do middle-class followed the standard of Finance. To them the " country " meant the financial system. In each the masses had no clear idea as to what they meant by " the country," but were attached to an abstraction. They did believe, however, that, because it was their country, it was superior to any other. That belief both causes and prolongs wars.

Not less unfortunate in its results is the identification of the " country " with a particular group of temporary rulers, and the pretence that patriotism compels a blind following of those leaders for the time being.

I stress " temporary " because so many people, seeing the conditions of the hour with no background of history behind them, imagine that " whatever is " is, not necessarily " best," but unalterable. Objectors to Socialism are most of them convinced that the system called Capitalism has been in operation from time immemorial. Even if you tell

them that it is scarcely more than 150 years old, and that during those 150 years it has constantly been changing its form, they will not believe you. Yet if anything can be asserted as a generality beyond cavil, it is that nothing lasts long.

As late as the middle of the nineteenth century, when Trollope was writing his novels, dukes were still revered and influential in England. Less than a century before that they had been the most important people in the State. Now it is no exaggeration to say that dukes have less importance than dustman. Were dustmen to be withdrawn, the streets would be dirty; the wind would blow noxious germs into our nostrils, eyes, throats; disease would rage; death would diminish populations. If all the British dukes were knocked on the head or exiled, their disappearance would make no difference, it would not be noticed outside the circle of their relations, friends, and employees. All would go on as before.

The same is true of the nobility in France who for 150 years have had the same position as the dukes in England now occupy. Yet both the French and the British aristocracy seemed at one time to be as necessary and permanent as the sun, moon, and stars.

Since 1900 we have seen for ourselves how temporary are even the most permanent-looking structures of government. Anyone who had predicted in that year the disappearance within less than a generation of the three European Empires—Russia, Austria, Germany—would have been laughed at.

Only twelve months before he was an exile the dictator Louis Napoleon seemed to be at the height of his power. Diaz, dictator in Mexico, had the appearance of unshakeable strength until he was compelled to save his life by flight.

In all these cases, and in every case like them, "the country" meant something different as soon as the system of government had been changed. What had been patriotic was seditious (for example, attachment to dynasty, loyalty to tradition). What had been treasonable became the law of the land.



## “COUNTRY” MEANS RULING CLASS

The claims of society have always, as a matter of brute fact, been identified with the claims of a ruling oligarchy.—*Aldous Huxley in “Ends and Means.”*

We have still the continuing menace of a comparatively small number of people who honestly believe in their superior right to influence and direct the Government, and who are unable or unwilling to see and admit that the practices by which they maintain their privileges are harmful to the body politic.—*President Franklin Roosevelt, 1938.*

The colour of a State is determined by the colour of the mind of its citizens or, perhaps one should say, of those citizens who control its government.—*Leonard Woolf.*

I HAVE tried to show, so far, that the phrase “our country” has two meanings, one domestic, the other political. In this second sense “our country” is the system of government under which we live, and in particular the rulers who happen for the moment to be running that system.

The eighteenth century saw the connection between “country” and rulers more clearly than we do—saw that patriotism was used often as a cloak for dishonourable, even criminal designs. “The last refuge of a scoundrel,” Dr. Johnson called it. Gibbon meant the same thing when he wrote in 1772: “Charles Fox has become a patriot, and is already attempting to pronounce the words ‘country,’ ‘liberty,’ ‘corruption’—with what success time will discover.”

When a nation is told: “The country must prepare to defend itself” at enormous cost because armaments preserve peace, it means only that the politicians in power

have decided on an armaments programme. Were a change of government to occur, the new one might prefer to rely on a system of collective security. Then the opinion of "the country" would be that armaments on a large scale always lead to war.

When the 1914 call went forth in Britain, "Your King and country need you," it meant that the politicians had "stumbled and staggered" into a war which had to be fought with all the resources available. They were "the country" for the time being; they had to be supported. The king, who had nothing whatever to do either with the war or with the events that had led up to it, was put in as a matter of form.

Here again we find that the past has handed us a worn-out tradition which ought to have been thrown away, but which we have treasured and adapted to modern use.

A monarch (literally, a single ruler) was in truth "the country." He could call on all his subjects to sacrifice themselves for it. Then the monarchs' places were taken by Cabinets, which kept up the distinction between "the country" and the people who live in it. When they talked of "the country's interest," they meant "the interest of the Ruling Class." It was the perception of this fact which made so many young men declare that the appeal to fight for their country did not move them. In cool blood, looking at the matter in the steady light of reason, not in a glow of emotion, they saw that "the country" was a rhetorical expression meaning the small number who mainly own and effectively control it.

Under monarchical rule "the country" was the monarch's estate. Under dictatorship it is an embodiment of the dictator's will or whim. Under a democratic system it means a Cabinet, and behind the Cabinet the individuals or class whose will Ministers must obey.

Far back in the past we see this method of dupery in operation. At one period there were in England almost as many separate kingdoms as there are counties now. They fought frequently against one another. Appeals for the

mystical loyalty of their inhabitants to petty rulers induced them to fight. At a still earlier period priest-kings had ordered their subjects to kill and ravage for the honour of their tribal deities.

As belief in local gods faded, as small independent territories became merged in large ones, as the delusion of divinely-appointed monarchs lost its grip, it was necessary for rulers to use some other mystical appeal. “The country” came into being as an object of worship. Under the name of “the State” its supposed interest was even exalted above that of the individuals who composed it. As priests of Baal showed their devotion by gashing themselves with knives, so men and women were expected to sacrifice their comfort, their liberty, their self-respect, for the benefit of “the State,” which, in fact, signifies those who are in control of the State.

Not until the Peoples put from them all thought of war, and have done away with Ruling Classes which look on war as necessary for the stability or enlargement of their power, will the worship of the country, the State, die out. With it will die the ignorant belief in the differences between people inhabiting different territories, from which belief springs the illusion of national character.

When that occurs, all men will be known to belong to one great family. The trifling surface differences which distinguish some from others will seem unimportant when set against the instincts and qualities which are common to all—the fundamental humanity which all share.

Then there will be no cult of “the country”; national patriotism will be as dead as the patriotisms which once centred round an altar, a throne, a city. Mankind will be free from many of the bugbears which haunt it—the bugbear of racial pride, the bugbear of inherent distinctions between groups of humanity, the bugbear of supposedly hostile popular interests and of enmities diligently engineered. The world will be everyone’s country, and the aim set before all men—to make life rich and full and free.

James Russell Lowell defined “country” in its political

sense as "certain persons elevated for the time being to high station." He saw, too, what a French boy, fighting for Spanish freedom, expressed nobly when he said: "My country is wherever liberty is in danger." The American poet and diplomat put the same thought into different, but not less stirring words:—

"Our true country is bounded on the north and south, on the east and the west, by Justice."

He proclaimed that patriotism was a shifting quicksand which called for enthusiasm, now on behalf of one cause, now in favour of another, and that its different objects often followed one another with bewildering rapidity.

Patriotism denotes support of the aims which at any given moment are being pursued by the visible or invisible rulers of a country. It has no solid or permanent quality. It alters with the tides—tides of national sentiment, material prosperity, bold democratic advance, or cowering submission to despotism.

"Be patriots!" cries the monarch intent upon theft of territory. "Where is your patriotism?" asks the demagogue, urging the mob to fling the monarch out. "Your patriotic duty to die!" shouts the same demagogue, when he has muddled his country into war.

Analyse what is meant by the word "country" when it is used in conjunction with patriotism: it will be found to signify always, as Lowell put it, "certain persons elevated for the time being to high station"—in plainer language, the momentary rulers who speak in a nation's name. Equally, what these rulers speak gives the key-note to the "national character." I will illustrate this by examples.

In the middle of last century a British Government declared war on Russia. Many thousands of British young men "patriotically" gave their lives "for their country," as they believed, in the Crimea. Not many years passed before it was agreed that this war had been a ghastly mistake. A member of another Government, the famous Lord Salisbury, for a long time Conservative Prime

Minister, said it had been an error to back the Sultan of Turkey against the Tsar.

Was it "the country" that sent all these patriotic young men to their deaths in the Crimea? Was it "the country" which admitted that they threw away their lives for nothing?

No, it was in each case a group of politicians who, in the first, made a hideous blunder; and, in the second, admitted that a blunder had been made. The admission was belated. The patriotic young men stayed dead.

Again, during the years 1899-1902 "the country" was called on by a British Cabinet to send large numbers of its young men to conquer the South African Dutch Republics (Transvaal and Orange Free State). Immense cost was incurred in subduing the Boer farmers. The aim of the statesmen who made the war, Cecil Rhodes, Joseph Chamberlain, and Alfred Milner, was to add the territories then annexed to the British Imperial possessions. The Government (Conservative) which was in power in Britain concurred in this plan. Some years later a new Government (Liberal) resolved very wisely to hand the territories back to the Boers. This led to the Union of South Africa being formed as a self-governing Dominion. Now the British Government in London has nothing to do with South African affairs.

Thus "the country" changed its mind completely within seven years. Those who protested against the war, those who declined to "fight for their country," were proved to have been right. Those who died or were disabled for life "on behalf of their country" were shown soon afterwards, by the action their country took, to have died or been mutilated for an end which their country repudiated.

Until monarchs became back numbers, the flame of patriotism used to be fanned by monarchical bellows. Loyalty bordered very often on lunacy. The Churches proclaimed obedience to kings as an essential virtue, on a level with obedience to God (except when kings refused to do what the Churches told them; in such event subjects

were released from their obligations and at times even encouraged to murder their sovereigns). A mystic devotion to the idea of monarchy conquered all the doubts aroused by the wickedness or imbecility of monarchs. In general, the worst kings were the most popular.

The novelist Smollett made Roderick Random ridicule a French soldier who told him "he had the honour of seeing Louis XIV and of receiving many wounds in helping to establish his glory." Roderick "could not help expressing his astonishment at the absurdity of a rational being who thought himself highly honoured in being permitted to encounter abject poverty, oppression, famine, disease, mutilation, and evident death, merely to gratify the vicious ambition of a prince by whom his sufferings were disregarded and his name utterly unknown."

If Frenchmen were forced to fight, Roderick continued, he could praise their patience and fortitude; if they were taking up arms in defence of their injured country, they might be applauded; if they had fled to the Army in order to avoid greater evils (though greater could hardly be imagined), they might justify their choice. But for a man to undergo hardship and risk his life to win glory for his prince

"was no more than professing himself a desperate slave, who voluntarily underwent the utmost wretchedness and peril, and committed the most flagrant crimes to soothe the barbarous pride of a fellow-creature, his superior in nothing but the power he derived from the submission of such wretches as him."

That was the delusion which afflicted the mind of Europe before the chimera of national character was invented. It lasted longer in France than elsewhere. The devotion inspired by Napoleon was fully as warm as that lavished on Louis XIV. In England the last king for whom subjects felt proud to die was Charles I, though as late as 1745 a worthless descendant of his found many Scots and some English foolish enough to offer him their lives.

Napoleon was a romantic figure, a skilful commander in the field. He took care of his men, gave them opportunities to rise. Self-sacrificing loyalty to him was not so ludicrous as to a king who did nothing in all his life to endear himself to his subjects or in any way impress their imagination. The Young Pretender and the first two Georges extinguished personal devotion to the idea of monarchy in England. For that idea, however, there was promptly substituted another almost equally harmful—pride in being English. This was cleverly fostered by cunning politicians as a means of gaining votes. It led their dupes into excesses not less absurd than those which were born of the monarchical illusion.

Just about the time when Smollett was satirizing the French, Voltaire, as we have seen earlier, was making fun of an English sailor, who was boasting of English liberty, although at the moment he was being carried off by a press-gang for forced service in the Navy. Freedom became the national deity and was worshipped, like other deities, with decent dissimulation by rulers, with unthinking acquiescence by the ruled.

Wordsworth wrote sonnets to it while the population was being reduced to a condition harder than that of slaves. Tennyson made rhymes about it at a period when another poet with clearer vision and purer sympathy called on her countrymen to heed "The Cry of the Children." The middle-class, enriched by slavery and the toil of tiny hands, declared England to be the finest country in the world. And the poor fools who had been liberated from the dominance of the King legend rushed to put themselves under a delusion not less harmful.

As we look back across the bloodstained waste of history, the temptation is strong to give up hope that the masses will ever cease to be victims of self-seeking, ruthless, domineering men. Escaped from one tyranny, they pass immediately under another. Relieved from the superstitions nurtured by priestcraft, they allow presbyters to impose upon them follies and horrors not less disgusting.

Now that kings can no longer treat them as "packs of savage hounds" and halloo them on against other packs they are persuaded by politicians to halloo themselves on. The concept of royalty having become what Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria called it—"a mighty ruin"—motivated allow dictators to build upon the dust and wreckage fresh structures of absolutism.

"What is the use," we are at moments forced to ask ourselves, "of trying to save these credulous, unreflecting masses? Their destiny is to be deceived."

Yet, if our belief in the ultimate triumph of what is rational and natural can overcome this temptation, we cast off doubts. We take courage from the emergence in the U.S.S.R. of a group of governing men who made what Carlyle called the Condition of the People question their main concern. We remember, too, that in the U.S.A. a President proclaimed that a nation's greatness can lie in "threatening none, coveting the possessions of none desiring the overthrow of none."

At the time those words were spoken by Woodrow Wilson, the American people thrilled to them as their forefathers had thrilled to Abraham Lincoln's. Noble words sincerely spoken seldom fail of their effect. Unfortunately the effect does not last long if it is followed by words, deceitful, cynical, from other people; words appealing to the baser element in human nature.

Americans have been through many moods since Wilson stirred the best in them by refusing to make war on the worn-out pretext of defending national honour, or in order to protect business interests. They saw him compelled to fight so that the Allies might not default on their debts to American manufacturers and money-lenders. That made them doubt his sincerity. But there will come other leaders with Wilson's ideals and more than Wilson's ability to make them realities.

Neither the American nor any other nation can attain to such reality under its own steam, so to speak. No crowd has initiative. It acts upon suggestion or remains inert.



It must be led if it is to do more than make a noise. Its leaders must have the power to persuade, the force to carry masses of people with them, the persistence that alone can keep the masses keyed up to high resolves. This implies belief in themselves, joined to belief in a cause ; it implies the consuming, fiery faith that can move mountains.

All great human movements have energy of that order behind them. If the energy lasts long enough to let a system be formed, the movement remains for a time part of the world-order. If it evaporates before its achievements can be systematized, as Orphism did, and Mithraism later on, it is no more heard of, except in a footnote to history. Sometimes a system alters completely the basis of a movement. Thus Pauline Christianity altered the teaching of Jesus, substituting for comradeship as the basis of a good life the acceptance of unintelligible dogma, while later development laid upon Christians the necessity of surrendering conscience either to a priest or to a book.

Often a system disappoints those who were persuaded to follow the movement out of which it grew. Voices are raised against it. The belief spreads that a mistake was made. Institutions which claim to be inseparable from “the country” are thrown down. The French mistook their emperor’s interest for “their country’s” when they went to war in 1870. They quickly changed their minds, however, and chased their emperor out. Did he take “the country” with him ?

Do we say that the Germans were animated by genuine “love of country” when they cheered for war in 1914 ? No ; we say they were deluded by the Hohenzollerns. When they discovered the delusion, out went the Hohenzollern dynasty. But “the country” did not go to live at Doorn in Holland !

There was no cheering for Hitler’s wars, no belief among the German People that they were fighting for anything worth while. Hitler had to give out that they were defending themselves, that he had been forced into war by Britain. But they were well aware that he attacked Poland

with the knowledge that Britain was pledged to its support. They say : " Our country made another mistake, greater than that of 1914." They mean that Hitler did. He was " the country " for the time being.

When people are told " You must fight for your country " it means they must fight for the policy of a Government—that is, for what a dictator or a Cabinet of politicians have decided on. (They do not always decide, do not always have a policy. They " stumble and stagger," they blunder into war.)

That in the past almost any king, emperor, dictator, or bunch of politicians, as soon as they made war deliberately, or blundered into it, could count upon the almost united support of their nations, shows how completely crazy the mass of people go at the sound of the word " war " after hearing or reading a few warlike speeches made by politicians.

Try to imagine " our country," in the political sense, apart from politicians. Try to attach any other sense to " patriotism." It is not possible.

It is sometimes argued :—

" Politicians represent ' the country ' because they have been elected to do so.

" If the electors change their minds, the politicians can be displaced.

" Persuasion can make electors change their minds ; so the road to better things is always open."

That sounds plausible, but nobody who has seen how elections are won can admit that persuasion has much to do with victory. It should be the deciding factor, but at the stage which British and American democracy has reached it is usually propaganda which decides.

Far more powerful than any argument is a catch-word, a slogan, a phrase that sticks in a voter's mind, while reasoned appeals can get no lodgment there.

Analysis having shown that " our country " holds different meanings for different people, no succinct definition of it is possible. That any mystic bond exists,

uniting all who belong to a nation, is palpable nonsense, seeing how frequently they fight among themselves for opposing interests or ideals.

We do not need to go back to past history for illustrations of this. We have seen for ourselves many examples of nations divided so deeply and bitterly as to make the idea of national character or the genius of the race nonsensical. Does the Spanish character lean towards feudalism, the rule of soldiers, submission to priestly pretensions, or in the direction of democracy, equality, freedom from every kind of dominance and superstition? Is the genius of the Russian Slavs favourable to absolutism or a republic, the rule of a privileged few or government by and for the people, a Church corrupt and retrograde or unfettered play of mind? Were the Germans more truly represented by their triumvirate, Hitler, Goering, and Goebbels, or by men whom they drove into exile such as Einstein, Bruno Frank, Thomas Mann?

Sometimes we can attribute what are called “ changes in national character ” to the initiative of a single man. Kemal Ataturk had this kind of influence on the Turks. He gave them new outlooks ; he altered their institutions and, more important still, their customs ; he aroused them from the lethargy of fatalism. In China Sun-yat-sen’s appeals, backed up by prominent and powerful friends, persuaded the Chinese that they were not behind the West in energy intelligence, or enterprise, and soon the world was saying “ The Chinese character is not what it was ”—without perceiving that such an admission exploded the “ national character ” idea.

Another proof of its falsity is the absence of any tie closely binding together the members of a nation. To suggest that all who are “ fellow-countrymen ” are conscious of mutual sympathy is as plainly untrue as it would be to say that they have common interests. Bring together half-a-dozen business men of different nationalities, or half-a-dozen doctors, or half-a-dozen professors : they will make friends more quickly, find more to talk about,

discover that they have more in common, than half-a-dozen people chosen haphazard from any one nation.

If there were reality in the "fellow-countrymen" idea, employers would not keep down the wages and refuse to shorten the hours of their workers who share nationality with them. Manufacturers and traders would not pile up profits at the expense of citizens of their own State. They might be harsh or extortionate to "foreigners," but not to anybody belonging to the same "fatherland" as themselves.

We do not find that the "country" has any of these effects; it is no more than a sentimental catchword, save in the mouths of those who use it for their own purposes.

All are bound up together:—

the nation as a separate entity,  
national interest,  
national character,  
national superiority,  
national honour.

All are used—unwittingly by some—to deceive people; to make them subservient to self-appointed rulers, who may flaunt the power of absolutism or may remain in the shadow, giving directions unseen, as financial groups do; to keep up the delusion that war is natural and necessary.

Until we can blow away these deceptions we cannot hope for more sanity, greater tolerance, wider sympathy, in human affairs. The first step towards lasting peace is to convince ourselves that the barrier of nationality is no more real than barriers of religion or race, both of which in the past have been looked on as insurmountable.

When men divided themselves into smaller units than nations, a *gens*, a family, was hostile to other *gentes*. Then families coalesced into tribes, and tribes warred with each other. Inhabitants of different districts in England and Scotland lived in enmity, so long as they had different rulers whose interest lay in keeping them at loggerheads.

Now we admit that these barriers were artificial. We laugh at the suggestion that Yorkshiremen and Devon men,

East-country and Midland folk, could ever have been in any sense separate strains of humanity ; and if it be suggested that their interests may have been opposed before they were merged in the English nation, the reply is that, while their rulers' interests certainly clashed, those of the ruled were identical. What all wanted was security of livelihood at home and peace abroad.

So long as Scotland was an independent kingdom, and Ireland the unwilling vassal of England, the surface unlikenesses between Scots, Irish, and English were dwelt upon, emphasized, exaggerated. When they intermarried, lived under the same laws, were given education which aimed at wiping out any insistence on separate nationality, the idea of it gradually faded.

Since Ireland became a Dominion and its rulers set about reviving the idea, the separateness of the Irish has been asserted afresh. If Scottish nationality were to be transformed from a pleasant glow of romantic idealism into an illusion that Scots and English are racially and by character unlike one another, there would follow a similar parade of separatism. That might occur if Scotland also had Dominion status and were to be ruled by politicians eager to enhance their own importance at no matter what expense to the mass of people.

Such eagerness always has been noticeable in politicians, if allowed to be shown. Wisest of all democracies, the Athenian made provision for expelling by the method of ostracism any ruler in whom such a tendency appeared. In all democratic constitutions of the future the principle of the recall should be firmly embedded. Otherwise politicians will be as mischievous as were kings and emperors in keeping peoples apart.

The advance of knowledge, and extending of civilization, have thrown down many of the fences which helped to do that. We recognize our common descent, we are beginning to realize our common interest. The chief obstacle in the way of that realization is the illusion of national character.



# The Scientific Outlook

IN critical times, when emotional forces are dominant in most of us, the scientific outlook becomes especially valuable. What is the scientific outlook? It is an attitude of mind, a way of thinking which is characteristic of all true men of science. The essential quality of the scientific outlook is freedom from bias or prejudice. The only objective of the scientist is truth, no matter how unpleasant it may be or how much discomfiture it may cause among people whose cherished beliefs are proved to be erroneous. The genuine scientist searches out the facts, testing and evaluating as he proceeds. He tries to distinguish the true from the false, the significant from the trivial. His disciplined imagination suggests explanations for the things he observes. Every fact and idea must be impartially examined and tested before it can be accepted or rejected, and the scientist is prepared to abandon any hypothesis or theory if some new fact shows it to be untenable. This cautious and critical testing of ideas is a habit of mind difficult for the average man to adopt, particularly in regard to the problems of human society. It is relatively easy to be impartial about the properties of matter, but it is difficult to be objective and unprejudiced when considering the great and complex problems of political and economic organization.

The Rationalist Press Association exists to foster and cultivate the scientific outlook and the arts of reason. Since its foundation over forty years ago it has printed and sold more than six million cheap reprints of the works of the great constructive thinkers, and hundreds of thousands of copies of new works on Science, Philosophy, History, and Religion. The R.P.A. defines Rationalism as the unreserved acceptance of reason as the guiding factor in human affairs and the rejection of all arbitrary assumptions of moral or intellectual authority. Ethical values must be subject to the sanction of reason and experience, and not dictated by any vested interest.

The R.P.A. believes that if a scientific and rational outlook is to prevail it must be fostered by groups of sincere men and women in every part of the country who will strive to make its meaning and value known to the public. By becoming members of the R.P.A. they can maintain personal contact with other Rationalists and discuss with them the best methods of propaganda.

## JOIN THE R.P.A. NOW

*(See over for Application Form)*

**NOTE.**—Members are entitled to receive publications of the Association to the *full value* of their Annual Subscriptions. Minimum Subscription, 5s.

# APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

---

To THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,  
*The Rationalist Press Association Limited,*  
*Nos. 4-6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, London, E.C. 4.*

DEAR SIR,

I desire to become a Member<sup>1</sup> of the Rationalist Press Association Limited, and enclose herewith my first annual subscription<sup>2</sup> of.....<sup>3</sup>; my Membership to commence with the current year.<sup>3</sup> I agree to abide by the Rules and Regulations of the Association as set forth in the Memorandum and Articles of Association.<sup>4</sup>

Please write in block letters	{	Name .....
		[If lady, state whether Mrs. or Miss]
		Address .....
		.....
{	Occupation .....	
	[Completion Optional]	

Date..... Signature

A Subscriber who does not wish to have his or her name published in the Annual Report or any other subscription list can add here the initials or pseudonym under which the contribution is to be acknowledged.

Initials or Pseudonym .....

---

<sup>1</sup> Persons under twenty-one years of age are not eligible for Membership, but may become "Non-member Subscribers."

<sup>2</sup> The minimum subscription is 5s., but it is hoped that those who can afford to subscribe more liberally will do so.

<sup>3</sup> Subscriptions are due in advance on the first of January of each year, so that persons who apply for Membership late in the year should cross out "the current" and substitute "next" if it be not their intention to renew the subscription in the following January. Members joining late in the year, however, are entitled to receive the Association's publications to the full value of their subscriptions.

<sup>4</sup> The Memorandum and Articles of Association, or any desired information, will be forwarded free on application to the Secretary.







# **POPULATION, PSYCHOLOGY, AND PEACE**

By J C FLUGEL

In this volume Professor Flugel deals with the social, ethical, and political aspects of a fundamental problem—the population problem—which must be faced if human life throughout the world is to become more prosperous and more peaceful. In addition to defining the laws of population and their inexorable effects, he brings to light the deep psychological causes of the prevailing tendency to deny the laws and ignore their consequences. These vitally important issues are handled in lucid and cogent language, and with a “quiet reasonableness” to which Dr. Joad, in his Introduction, pays a well-deserved tribute.

*2s. 6d. net*

# **HUMAN NATURE, WAR, AND SOCIETY**

By JOHN COHEN

“What are the causes of war?” is a question which has often been asked in the past, and which will, it is to be hoped, be asked much oftener in the future. Dr. Cohen has written a book which can be confidently recommended to all students of the subject. His aim has been to discover a factual basis for formulating an hypothesis of the causes of warfare. The most urgent problem to-day is to prevent World War III. It is as a small contribution to the solution of the problem that this book is offered.

*2s. 6d. net*

C. A. WATTS & CO. LTD.

11970

# **RACIAL PRIDE AND PREJUDICE**

By E. J. DINGWALL

The belief that mankind is divided into races of which some are intrinsically superior to others, and therefore destined to be their masters, is responsible for an appalling record of human misery and unhappiness—wholesale massacres, persecution, and enslavement.

False and fanatical notions of race and colour are chiefly associated, in the popular mind, with German Nazism. But in fact they have a longer history and are more widespread than is commonly supposed, constituting one of our major post-war problems.

Dr. E. J. Dingwall here presents a study of the question from the point of view of the anthropologist and the psychologist, but written in a simple and interesting style, free of academic jargon, and eminently suited to the needs and taste of the general reader.

8s. 6d. net

C. A. WATTS & CO. LTD.

5 & 6 Johnson's Court Fleet Street, London, E.C.

